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## THE GOAT

(P.16)

**NATIONAL VIEW**

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# Ducks Unlimited

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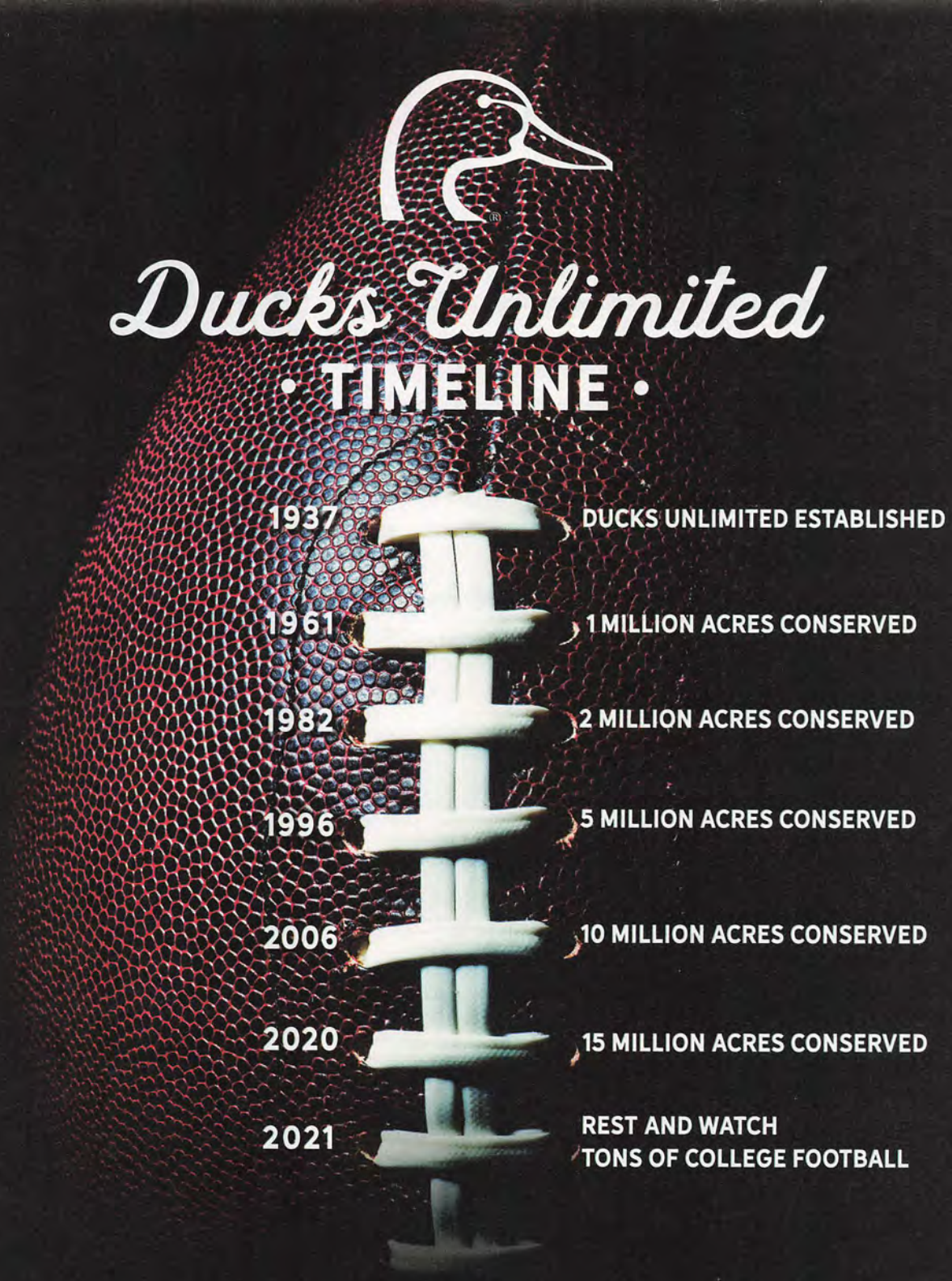


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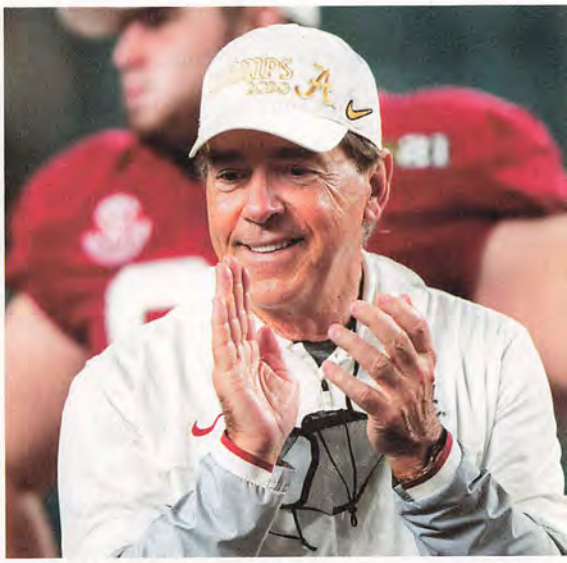


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# Letter from the Publisher

This year marks the 40th year of *Lindy's* being in the sports annual publishing business. *Lindy's* first published a Southeastern edition in 1982 and added a Big Ten edition in 1987. We started publishing our National College edition in 1998.

After last year's lockdowns, limited seating and canceled games, everyone is glad to have college football all the way back. A sincere thank you goes out to all of the heroic medical staffs, administrators, coaches and players who shouldered through to give us a 2020 season.

Nick Saban won his seventh national championship last year (six at Bama) and generally is considered the GOAT. Anthony Gimino takes an inside look at what makes Saban (and the process) tick beginning on page 16.

As always, your comments and suggestions are appreciated.

Have a great season!

Sincerely,

Lindy Davis Jr.

Lindy Davis

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# NATIONAL PICKS

Photo by Mark J. Rebilas

## 1. ALABAMA

# Returning Starters? Doesn't Matter

You really will need to buy a game program at Bryant-Denny Stadium in 2021. That No. 6 won't be DeVonta Jones. And it won't be Mac Jones wearing No. 10. Nor Najee Harris under the crimson helmet with the 22 on it. Alas, that's the nature of college football, and Nick Saban has proven through the years that it matters not a whit at Alabama.

Sometimes we get bogged down in things like "number of returning starters," but the real story is that the Tuscaloosa Master Gardeners (they're good) plant bulbs of future NFL draft picks in the end zone and they bloom every daggone year without fail. It's not the number of returning starters that matter, but how many brilliant flowering bulbs that gardener Nick and his staff have planted during recruiting.

And it has been more than enough — producing 10 or more victories 13 consecutive years, with six national championships. Five of the last six have made it to the last game of the year, with three titles.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** For all the attention the offense received last season with 49 points a game and the Heisman Trophy winner and the two other almost-Heisman Trophy winners and all that, the defense allowed an average of 19.4 points against 11 SEC opponents, Notre Dame and Ohio State. Eight teams didn't get to 20 points and might not again in 2021 with the Tide loaded at each level of the defense, with Christian Harris the latest in a long line of perfect-specimen linebackers leading the way.

Add the best kicking game in the country and it becomes apparent that the offense won't have to blow teams off the field this year, anyway. Bryce Young is ready at quarterback, Brian Robinson Jr. is a quality running back among other quality running backs, wide receiver John Metchie III leads the way … and new offensive coordinator Bill O'Brien knows what to do with them.

**THE BAD NEWS:** When only three starters return on offense and the line is undergoing changes, things are not all rosy. And even though Young is the unquestioned starter, his only experience has been mopping up. Some young running backs and receivers will have to step forward (which always happens). And opening against Miami is not an easy way to start with such inexperienced players and a new staff that hasn't made game adjustments together.

Half of the coaching staff has turned over, and sometimes those changes aren't perfectly smooth (ask Auburn and LSU about that). O'Brien has spent a decade as a head coach at Penn State and the Houston Texans; how will he fit as offensive coordinator? New O-line coach Doug Marrone, too, has spent 10 of the past 12 years as a head coach. How will they and three other new assistants fit into the Saban way?

**OUR CALL:** It seems the Tide would be in the national title hunt if Saban had zero returning starters. And this year, there are eight on a defense that is going to be lights-out. The Young Era begins. He's No. 9, by the way.

# NATIONAL PICKS

## 2. CLEMSON

***Compliant ACC Makes It Sorta Easy***

Another season, another run at a national championship. A seventh consecutive ACC title is a given, even post-Trevor. The Tigers are already the first school to win six in a row in any current conference. Dabo Swinney loses Trevor Lawrence, Travis Etienne and some playmakers on defense, but the cupboard is always full at Clemson.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** We've gotten a glimpse of D.J. Uiagalelei, and that's enough. The quarterback's athleticism makes him perhaps even more dangerous than Lawrence. Aside from the opener against Georgia, Clemson's biggest challenge may be at NC State. The defense is loaded, including sixth-year LB James Skalski. Budding star Bryan Bresee anchors a typically tough defensive line.

**THE BAD NEWS:** Tailback Lyn-J Dixon is no Etienne, but who is? The Tigers open 2021 with a de facto playoff game against Georgia in Charlotte. To be real here, the Tigers might actually be able to survive a loss. After that Clemson plays only three more teams with 2020 winning records (NC State, BC and Pitt).

**OUR CALL:** Expect a fifth CFP Championship Game berth in the last seven years. The ACC offers little resistance, and these cats are too dominant (even after significant personnel losses) to expect anything less.

## 3. OKLAHOMA

***Ready to Win a Playoff Game (or Two)***

The Sooners have more depth and more talent on defense than they've had in at least a decade. That makes Lincoln Riley very happy going into his fifth season at the helm. Imagine Baker Mayfield or Kyler Murray having this kind of defense at their disposal.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** Riley has put together strong recruiting classes, has mined the transfer portal for Power 5 veterans and this year has 19 starters back. He also brings back arguably the nation's top quarterback in Spencer Rattler. This is a big year for OU.

**THE BAD NEWS:** Creed Humphrey's departure for the NFL hurts because he was a two-time captain and a two-time Big 12 Lineman of the Year. Two experienced defensive backs also left for the draft. The receiver corps led the nation with nine dropped TD passes — yes, touchdowns, not just passes.

**OUR CALL:** Chalk up a seventh straight Big 12 championship. The real question is if Alex Grinch's defense truly has the depth to compete for a national championship. Among the usual frontrunners, only Oklahoma returns its quarterback. Is that good enough for OU to win a playoff game? Or even two?

## 4. GEORGIA

***Back on the Rise with Daniels***

Once coach Kirby Smart finally took the kid gloves off JT Daniels late last season when the former USC quarterback's ACL injury fully healed, the Bulldogs leaped from a quality SEC team into a 2021 national playoff-quality team. Even nine players being drafted by the NFL does not deplete the substantial talent on this roster.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** There is top-tier talent at every offensive position, even after star receiver George Pickins suffered an ACL tear in the spring. The committee at tailback offers great depth, led by Zamir White and James Cook, and the receiving corps is still the deepest it has been in years.

**THE BAD NEWS:** Don't kid yourself, having to replace nine NFL draft picks (plus Pickens) in one offseason is impossible. And talented CB Tyrique Stevenson transferring to Miami creates problems in the secondary since the coverage talent needs ripening. Also, neither line is exactly stocked with veterans.

**OUR CALL:** Georgia opens with Clemson in Atlanta and expects to end the regular season with Alabama in the SEC title game. Two of those three figure to land in the CFP championship, and don't rule out UGA. These guys are, after all, still better than anybody else on their schedule.

## 5. OHIO STATE

***Fifth Straight Big Ten Title Seems Passe'***

Oh, to be Ryan Day. Young. Wealthy. A rising star in his profession. Being able to bring five-star and four-star players onto the roster on sort of a whim. You had to be impressed by his trip to the national title game last season. Not the national title game itself, but he's only 42, give him time.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** It's Ohio State. The locker room oozes star talent. For starters: Is there a better WR tandem than Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson? No. RB Master Teague III takes over for Trey Sermon. But keep an eye on incoming freshman TreVeyon Henderson. The kid is boffo.

**THE BAD NEWS:** It's Ohio State. How bad can it ever be? QB Justin Fields is gone. Yet, Day will sort through an uber-talented trio of youngsters. Only three of the top 10 tacklers are back. DE Zach Harrison, DT Haskell Garrett and CB Sevyn Banks must lead the way.

**OUR CALL:** Day is 23-2 overall as Buckeye boss and still perfect vs. the Big Ten: 15-0. Look it up. Who does that? What's next? A national title. That might not happen this year, but OSU is good enough to wear the Big Ten for a fifth season in a row. Bored yet, Brutus? Didn't think so.

## 6. TEXAS A&M

***It's Year 4 for Jimbo ... that's Big***

Can a team with a new quarterback AND a retooled offensive line win the SEC West? Well, A&M can try, and the Aggies' defense likes to think it can make the difference. As everyone in College Station knows, Jimbo Fisher won the national title his fourth year at Florida State, and in Year 4 in Aggieland, things are trending just about right.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** The speed of this defense makes it look like 12 men are on the field, and this group could be even better than last year's. RBs Isaiah Spiller and Devon Achane are a terrific 1-2 punch, and there is good pass-catching talent, particularly with Ainias Smith splitting out wide.

**THE BAD NEWS:** Much of the plan revolves around the offensive line creating time and space — time for QB Haynes King (or Zach Calzada) to operate and space for Spiller and Achane to run wild. Yet, only one starter returns up front, and even All-America guard Kenyon Green is changing positions, moving to left tackle.

**OUR CALL:** One of the top 10 defenses in the country returns almost intact. The Aggies will run the ball well enough, but can they protect an inexperienced quarterback to do significant damage downfield? Perhaps not immediately, but by Oct. 9 and beyond ... hmmm.

## 7. IOWA STATE

***Blowing into the National Elite to Stay?***

Matt Campbell's mission to build a winning culture in Ames appears to be sustainable. After he led last year's Cyclones within reach of their first conference title in 108 years, Iowa State signed him to an extension through 2028 that pays him $4 million annually. Taking the program to its first-ever AP Top 10 finish will do that for a guy.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** Among the Cyclones' 19 returning starters are eight members of the All-Big 12 first team. That includes dynamic QB Brock Purdy and national rushing leader and unanimous All-American Breece Hall, plus receiver Xavier Hutchinson, tight end Charlie Kolar and league Defensive Player of the Year Mike Rose.

**THE BAD NEWS:** All-Big 12 DL Ja'Quan Bailey leaves a massive hole in a formidable defense. The Cyclones eventually have to meet the moment: With a championship in the balance, the Cyclones coughed up three turnovers, including a game-ending interception, in a 27-21 loss to OU.

**OUR CALL:** Playing in their first Big 12 title game and their first New Year's Six Bowl shows how far Campbell and his staff have taken things in Ames. Can they take it the next step — a conference crown and even a playoff spot? The talent seems to be there, but is it deep enough?

# NATIONAL PICKS

## 8. CINCINNATI

***Can Bearcats Crash the Party?***

Luke Fickell has established the Bearcats as the elite Group of Five program. One of these years, a Group of Five team will get to the CFP. Cincinnati might be that team. And this might be that year. Fickell has closed the recruiting borders around talent-rich Cincinnati and is 31-6 in the past three seasons. The defense has led the AAC for three straight seasons, and new coordinator Mike Tressel (from Michigan State) takes over a loaded unit.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** Fourteen starters return from a nine-win team that took Georgia to the wire in the Sugar Bowl. QB Desmond Ridder should be a Heisman Trophy candidate. DE Myjai Sanders (six sacks) and CB Ahmad Gardner (three picks) could end up as All-Americans.

**THE BAD NEWS:** Defensive coordinator Marcus Freeman being hired away by Notre Dame is a big loss. Gerrid Doaks is a hard man to replace at tailback, but after gaining nearly 500 yards as a backup, Jerome Ford could lessen the blow. Although the defense has been routinely formidable, there are key losses to replace up the middle.

**OUR CALL:** The Bearcats' season comes down to back-to-back roadies at Indiana and Notre Dame. Both foes are likely to be ranked and provide a legitimate boost to a CFP berth.

## 9. NORTH CAROLINA

***Brown and Howell Have Heels Clicking***

What Mack Brown has accomplished at North Carolina is remarkable — 15 wins in two seasons, including an Orange Bowl berth last season. And in that Orange Bowl loss to Texas A&M, the Tar Heels were missing their leading rusher, receiver and tackler, yet were tied in the fourth quarter before wearing down. They were one of the most entertaining teams to watch in 2020, and the momentum continues to build with a quarterback who is basically the Heisman co-frontrunner.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** Check the numbers — Sam Howell's passing yards, touchdown passes, yards per attempt and passer rating were all better than Trevor Lawrence's. The Tar Heels don't have to worry about facing Clemson (until the ACC title game, they hope). The defense should be better with coordinator Jay Bateman in Year 3.

**THE BAD NEWS:** Running backs Javonte Williams and Michael Carter have moved on, as well as receivers Dazz Newsome and Dyami Brown. The Heels are good but are they really a national power? It's a huge leap to Clemson.

**OUR CALL:** The Heels are the class of the Coastal Division. Even an eight- or nine-win season could get the Heels to the ACC title game, and that's where the spotlights would really get bright.

## 10. OREGON

***This Oregon Trail Can Lead to Playoff***

Asterisk or not, Oregon heads into 2021 as the two-time reigning Pac-12 champion. And the Ducks aren't going to give up the crown easily. The strong feeling is that Oregon has more to accomplish in coach Mario Cristobal's fourth season — and by more, we mean carrying the Pac-12 flag all the way to the College Football Playoff.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** Success on the recruiting trail has Oregon brimming with talent in all phases, most notably the dynamic duo of Noah Sewell and Kayvon Thibodeaux on defense. The addition of defensive coordinator Tim DeRuyter, and Joe Moorhead's first real offseason as offensive coordinator, should provide positive jolts on both sides of the ball.

**THE BAD NEWS:** Replacing Justin Herbert at quarterback last season proved difficult, and his long shadow continues to cast doubt over the position in 2021. Whoever starts gets thrown into a potential Playoff play-in (or play-out) Week 2 at Ohio State. Road games at divisional rivals Stanford and Washington are still daunting.

**OUR CALL:** Should one of the quarterbacks click, Oregon is a clear favorite to win the Pac-12. Getting to the Playoff is another matter with the Ohio State game looming, but the Ducks will remain well-positioned in their quest to three-peat.

## 11. NOTRE DAME

***Where 'Work in Progress' = 'Top 11'***

Even coach Brian Kelly calls this team, with fewer returning starters than any other ranked team, a "work in progress." But that doesn't mean a deep setback on his watch. After four-year starting QB Ian Book went to the NFL, Jack Coan transferred in from Wisconsin to give the Fighting Irish a chance. And when Clark Lea became head coach at Vanderbilt, Kelly plucked highly respected defensive coordinator Marcus Freeman from Cincinnati.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** Defenses will have to worry about stopping 1,000-yard back Kyren Williams (they won't), which should give Coan a chance to breathe and get things going to superb TE Michael Mayer. Watch for Freeman to pile pressure on offenses with quality linebackers and All-America safety Kyle Hamilton.

**THE BAD NEWS:** Having Book and three offensive linemen among nine players drafted shows the talent that must be replaced. With a relatively inexperienced secondary, Freeman might not be able to turn loose Hamilton as much as he'd like.

**OUR CALL:** To say Notre Dame is on autopilot is unfairly dismissive, but Kelly has things in place to return annually to the Top 10 or so. The Irish will be among the top dozen teams in the country for the sixth time in seven seasons, but a national title run is unlikely.

## 12. FLORIDA

***Building a New Mousetrap: Gators on the Run?***

The Gators have won 29 games in three years, and their team speed remains dangerous across the field, but how do they make up for the loss of QB Kyle Trask, TE Kyle Pitts, WR Kadarius Toney and five other NFL Draft picks? Coach Dan Mullen has the personnel to put more emphasis on the run and count on a new secondary (and staff) to shore up the back of a defense that gave up 31 points a game last year.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** QB Emory Jones has shown flashes of brilliance as a dual-threat change-up for three years. The top three running backs return, and they'll be joined (pushed?) by explosive Clemson transfer Demarkcus Bowman.

**THE BAD NEWS:** The defense was historically bad last season — as in, Florida's worst since World War I. But in keeping coordinator Todd Grantham and firing two secondary coaches, Mullen essentially scapegoated the defensive backfield, which is even less experienced this year.

**OUR CALL:** The Gators are the second-best team in the SEC East, but what does that mean? It means they'll have to do it a little differently this year. They'll have to control the ball more, which in turn might keep their defense off the field.

## 13. WISCONSIN

***After a Weird 2020, Another West Title***

What in the name of Barry Alvarez is going on here? The Badgers went 4-3 in 2020. Chalk it up mostly to COVID weirdness and injuries. This is Wisconsin, the land of milk, cheese and Big Ten West titles.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** Defense. Check this out: No foe scored more than 28 points vs. Bucky in 2020, which is saying something these days. Many of those staunch defenders are back. Say "hello" to LBs Jack Sanborn, Leo Chenal and Nick Herbig. Watch rising star QB Graham Mertz throw pretty spirals to TE Jake Ferguson and WRs Kendric Pryor and Danny Davis.

**THE BAD NEWS:** Offense. Where'd it go? That punishing run game? Absent. Your time is now, RB Jalen Berger. The Badgers averaged just 25.1 points last season, the program's lowest over the last 12 seasons. Weird season or no, that's not just enough, and makes stoic Paul Chryst frown.

**OUR CALL:** It's all there for Wisconsin, the motivation to rebound from a disappointing season, the toothy defense and kind of strong O-line that has made Madison famous. And Mertz has that look of a championship-caliber quarterback. Pencil Bucky into the West penthouse for the fifth time in eight years.

## 14. MIAMI

***Anxiously Awaiting Return of King***

Welcome to Episode 2,547 of: "Is Miami back? All the way back?" The Canes teased us four years ago with a 10-win season, but it isn't that simple. Following last year's 8-3 record, their first hurdle will be getting quarterback D'Eriq King healthy enough for the ACC campaign, so even though they start Sept. 4 with a sexy game against Alabama, their primary goal has to be to win the ACC Coastal Division.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** When King announced he was coming back, the Hurricanes chances for a big 2021 rose exponentially. Manny Diaz was one of the busier coaches in the transfer portal, landing, among others, WR Charleston Rambo (Oklahoma), DE Deandre Johnson (Tennessee) and CB Tyrique Stevenson (Georgia).

**THE BAD NEWS:** Even though King started the summer on track to return for fall workouts, regaining full speed after a torn ACL is still a substantial process that can't be rushed. The defensive losses are substantial, too.

**OUR CALL:** The 'Canes like to think they can get to a New Year's Six bowl, but that will take some doing. Last year was just weird in a lot of ways, but that 62-26 November loss to North Carolina didn't disappear with the vaccine and should be a motivating factor all summer.

## 15. OKLAHOMA STATE

***Hungrier Cowboys Could Sneak Up***

Mike Gundy's offense was loaded last season with record-setting playmakers and the defense returned 10 starters, but the Cowboys couldn't sustain the high-level success. This year the names aren't as dynamic — four of those Cowboys, including Chuba Hubbard and Tylan Wallace, are now in the NFL — but the foundation is there for the next generation.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** Jim Knowles' defense has eight full-time starters back, including playmakers like Kolby Harvell-Peel and Tre Sterling at safety, Malcolm Rodriguez at linebacker and Trace Ford and Tyler Lacy at end. Super sophomore Brennan Presley scored three TDs against Miami in the bowl game and will be a weapon for the offense.

**THE BAD NEWS:** QB Spencer Sanders was still loose with the football last season — he's now up to 19 interceptions and 27 total turnovers in his first 20 games as the starter. If he gets that figured out, he can be elite. If he doesn't, sophomore Shane Illingworth is waiting in the wings.

**OUR CALL:** Winning 23 games the past three seasons isn't bad, but last year's team underachieved. Younger, hungrier players at key positions might be just what the OSU offense needs. And with better defensive depth than ever, the Cowboys could sneak up.

## 16. LSU

***Don't Worry, It Was Only a Nightmare***

Following 2019's incredible dream, 2020 was supposed to be a down season for the LSU Tigers. But the incredible nightmare it became was nobody's idea of a good time in Baton Rouge. By the time the Tigers were 3-5, a whisper campaign was swirling about Ed Orgeron's job security — yes, roughly 10 pandemic-ugly months after winning the national championship. So, he fired three assistants. Problem solved.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** The entire offensive and defensive lines are back, which is a big deal in the SEC. The quarterback situation is stronger with Myles Brennan healthy and then-freshman Max Johnson showing Florida and Ole Miss he can lead victories.

**THE BAD NEWS:** After allowing 34.9 points (that's a touchdown worse than any LSU team on record), changes had to be made, and new coordinator Daronte Jones has eight starters back and some ideas to use their speed better.

**OUR CALL:** The Tigers start the season on a two-game winning streak, and let's not forget that this program had 21 players drafted into the NFL the past two years. They have talent stockpiled that we haven't even seen yet. So, yeah, ask Alabama, Auburn, A&M and Florida if they view this as a 5-5 team.

## 17. WASHINGTON

***Can Full Lake Effect Ground the Ducks?***

COVID-19 protocols derailed Washington in the latter stages of its first season under coach Jimmy Lake. The Huskies finished with the best winning percentage in the North, but could not participate in the Pac-12 Championship Game due to their shutdown, leaving these Dawgs with unfinished business.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** Lake oversaw some of college football's best secondaries and overall defenses in his roles under Chris Petersen. So, it's no surprise that his version of Washington football is built to thrive with standout playmakers in the secondary. Trent McDuffie, leader of the bunch, is one of the top cornerbacks in the country. Offensively, a stout and veteran line paves the way for a diverse running-back rotation.

**THE BAD NEWS:** Quarterback has been a consistent, lingering question for Washington. Freshman Sam Huard comes with a rich Washington pedigree and 5-star billing, but will he be the player to lead the Huskies back to the Playoff? He'd have to take the job from improving Dylan Morris. On defense, losing game-changing edge rusher Zion Tupuola-Fetui to an Achilles tear in spring changes the pass rush, and not for the better.

**OUR CALL:** Washington gets Oregon at home, which may well decide the North — and the Pac-12 as a whole.

## 18. IOWA

***No-Frills Ferentz Football Keeps Winning***

Entering his 23rd season as Hawkeye bossman, Kirk Ferentz is the only head coach in America who has been in the same job since the last century. And the 65-year-old Ferentz has shown no signs of trading in his clipboard for a fishing pole. So, that means the Hawkeyes are gonna be good … again.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** This is Iowa. The O-line is gonna be good. Tyler Linderbaum is the best snapper in America, and people who pay attention to such things could even give him a vote for the Heisman Damn Trophy. Watch RB Tyler Goodson compete for the Big Ten rushing title behind Ty and his bros.

**THE BAD NEWS:** Is QB Spencer Petras the real deal? His debut season was, to put it kindly, bumpy. And that was with a sterling receiver unit that is now being reworked. At least TE Sam LaPorta and WRs Nico Ragaini and Tyrone Tracy are back.

**OUR CALL:** The offense has plenty of potential. It's the defense that could have fans in Kinnick Stadium reaching for their flasks. What's it all mean? Sure, there will be ups, downs … but don't question that there will be a ninth bowl bid in a row. That'll make you proud to wear those gold and black-striped overalls.

## 19. ARIZONA STATE

***All Sun Devils Need is a Finishing Touch***

The Herm Train may be ready to reach its destination in 2021. Herm Edwards begins his fourth season at Arizona State with his most experienced lineup, headlined on offense by Jayden Daniels and by Merlin Robertson on defense.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** The Sun Devils came just two late-game possessions away from a perfect regular season and Pac-12 Championship Game appearance. Many key figures return for another run in what looks like Arizona State's most promising season since 2013. Daniels is a dark-horse Heisman contender, while RB Rachaad White sparkles with versatility.

**THE BAD NEWS:** Arizona State draws arguably the toughest in-conference schedule of the South frontrunners, facing Stanford and Washington out-of-division. And while the ground game is stacked with White and Chip Trayanum, Daniels needs to find a reliable No. 1 receiver in the passing attack.

**OUR CALL:** Late-season stumbles in recent years have kept Arizona State out of the Pac-12 title game under Edwards and predecessor Todd Graham. A November in which the Sun Devils host USC then travel to the Pacific Northwest on back-to-back weeks (Washington, Oregon State) will determine their conference title hopes.

# NATIONAL PICKS

## 20. INDIANA

***This is no Fairytale: Hoosiers are GOOD!***

Cinderella wore Crimson and Cream … and she's still shockingly awesome a year later. Thank Tom Allen, the indefatigable head coach who preaches LEO: Love Every One. Is he a bit corny? Yep. But, does it work? Yep. Allen is the genuine article in an industry of cardboard cutouts. He points to the brick wall and his players run through it.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** His name is Michael Penix Jr. And he just happens to be the best quarterback in the Big Ten. If he only could stay healthy. Penix has suffered a season-ending injury in three consecutive seasons. The good news continues on defense, where new coordinator Charlton Warren turns loose LB Micah McFadden and CBs Jaylin Williams and Tiawan Mullen.

**THE BAD NEWS:** Not much. But here's something to consider: The element of surprise is gone. Now, Indiana will be circled on the schedules of opponents. How will the Hoosiers deal with great expectations?

**OUR CALL:** After their highest finish in the AP poll (12th) since 1967 (4th), this is the first time Indiana has been in the AP preseason poll (they will be, don't worry) since 1969. Yes, Allen keeps waking up these kinds of echoes in a fairytale that shows no signs of ending.

## 21. PENN STATE

***Hoping to Pick Up Where They Left Off***

It's not how you start, it's how you finish, right? That's what Penn State is hoping after a Hyde and Jekyll 2020 season that saw the Nittany Lions began with a jaw-dropping 0-5 mark before ripping off four wins in succession to close the pandemic-shortened season. Now, if they can just pick up where they left off.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** Penn State is on its third OC in three years. Mike Yurcich is the new play-caller. And he'll have some toys to play with, including stud WR Jahan Dotson and a deep well of talent at running back. The secondary is something to brag about. Take a bow, Jaquan Brisker. This is Linebacker U, remember? They still have studs.

**THE BAD NEWS:** The defense has something to prove after allowing 27.7 points per game. It's hoped Temple import Arnold Ebiketie will bolster an overhauled line that loses stalwarts Jayson Oweh and Shaka Toney. QB Sean Clifford has been there and done that, but can he become more consistent?

**OUR CALL:** Yes, it was a shortened campaign. Still, the four wins marked the first time since 2015 that the Nits failed to win at least nine contests. Don't think overcaffeinated James Franklin isn't motived.

## 22. USC

***Can Trojans Win Pac-12 South Again?***

On the strength of dramatic comebacks against Arizona State and UCLA, USC reached its third Pac-12 Championship Game in six years. The 2021 Trojans will seek to rectify the title-game loss suffered against Oregon, but must do so without some figures central to the success of 2020.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** Kedon Slovis heads into his third year of quarterbacking Graham Harrell's offense. With elite talent Drake London at receiver and a versatile lineup of running backs, scoring points should be no problem for the Trojans one season after averaging 33.3 points per game.

**THE BAD NEWS:** After Todd Orlando's first season as defensive coordinator showed significant improvements from 2019, the challenge now is maintaining, despite significant turnover. Talanoa Hufanga, Jay Tufele, Olaijah Griffin and Marlon Tuipulotu are all gone, while Brandon Pili sustained a torn Achilles in the spring that could shelve him most of the season.

**OUR CALL:** USC may not be a clear favorite to win the Pac-12 South, but the Trojans still are arguably the division's most talented team. Avoiding Washington and Oregon in cross-divisional play is a plus, and if Orlando's defense and Harrell's "Air Raid" continue to progress, the Trojans will be pace-setters.

## 23. COASTAL CAROLINA

***Who are these guys? BYU knows***

Coastal Carolina's 11-0 regular season was the joy we didn't know we needed amid the strangest of seasons. The Chanticleers, in just their fourth season in the FBS, just kept stacking victories and handed BYU its only loss of the season in early December. Yeah, that exultation ended with a thud — the Sun Belt title game against Louisiana was cancelled, and the Chants suffered a narrow bowl loss to Liberty — but dang near everyone is back to rev it up for another joy ride.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** QB Grayson McCall leads a high-scoring outfit that uses a version of the triple option (no, not like the one used by the service academies). McCall can run and pass, and he has an NFL tight end in Isaiah Likely. In all, 21 starters return.

**THE BAD NEWS:** One of the few holes to fill is that left by DE Tarron Jackson, a sixth-round pick after being the Sun Belt Defensive Player of the Year. RB C.J. Marable is also off to an NFL camp. There's no marquee matchup in the regular season.

**OUR CALL:** More, please. Coach Jamey Chadwell and the Chants have the goods (and the schedule) to win 'em all. What the world needs now is an expanded playoff.

## 24. TEXAS

***Now it's Sark's Turn … tick, tick, tick***

There were signs of progress under Tom Herman, but after an unholy run of injuries in 2019 and an underachieving 2020, Texas pulled the plug. So the rebuild is on in Austin. Again. Enter Alabama offensive coordinator Steve Sarkisian, who had moderate success as head coach at Washington and USC. Personal demons knocked him out of football for a year, but he regained his footing with Nick Saban.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** QB Casey Thompson had a touchstone moment in the Alamo Bowl (8-of-10, 170 yards, four TDs in relief), but in the spring he didn't exactly secure the job over Hudson Card. Either way, it appears Sarkisian has some options, and he has put together a bumper staff to do it.

**THE BAD NEWS:** Texas continued to recruit well under Herman — it is Texas, after all — but it all amounted to zero conference titles, and there was significant roster churn after the coaching change. Last year the Longhorns played six one-possession games and went 3-3. With QB Sam Ehlinger in the NFL, that offense Sark plans to build has to be from the ground up.

**OUR CALL:** Sarkisian put up huge numbers as Nick Saban's OC at Alabama with a ton of first-round talent, but is his .568 career winning percentage the answer in Austin? Time will tell. And the clock is ticking.

## 25. AUBURN

***Can Harsin Kickstart Team Down South?***

The attention for months has been on new coach Bryan Harsin: Can the Boise guy make a difference? Yet, the key guy for 2021 might actually be Bo Nix. Two years ago as a freshman, he was a world-beater (and a Bama-beater), but last year he just wasn't. The Tigers offense struggled, scoring fewer than 24 points five times. OC Mike Bobo has the task of getting Bo back to being the 2019 Bo and then some.

**THE GOOD NEWS:** This roster has talent and a veteran quarterback. Tank Bigsby's power and speed make him an elite running back. The defense has experience in all the right places, and the new staff (with coordinators Derek Mason and Bobo) brings a fresh approach.

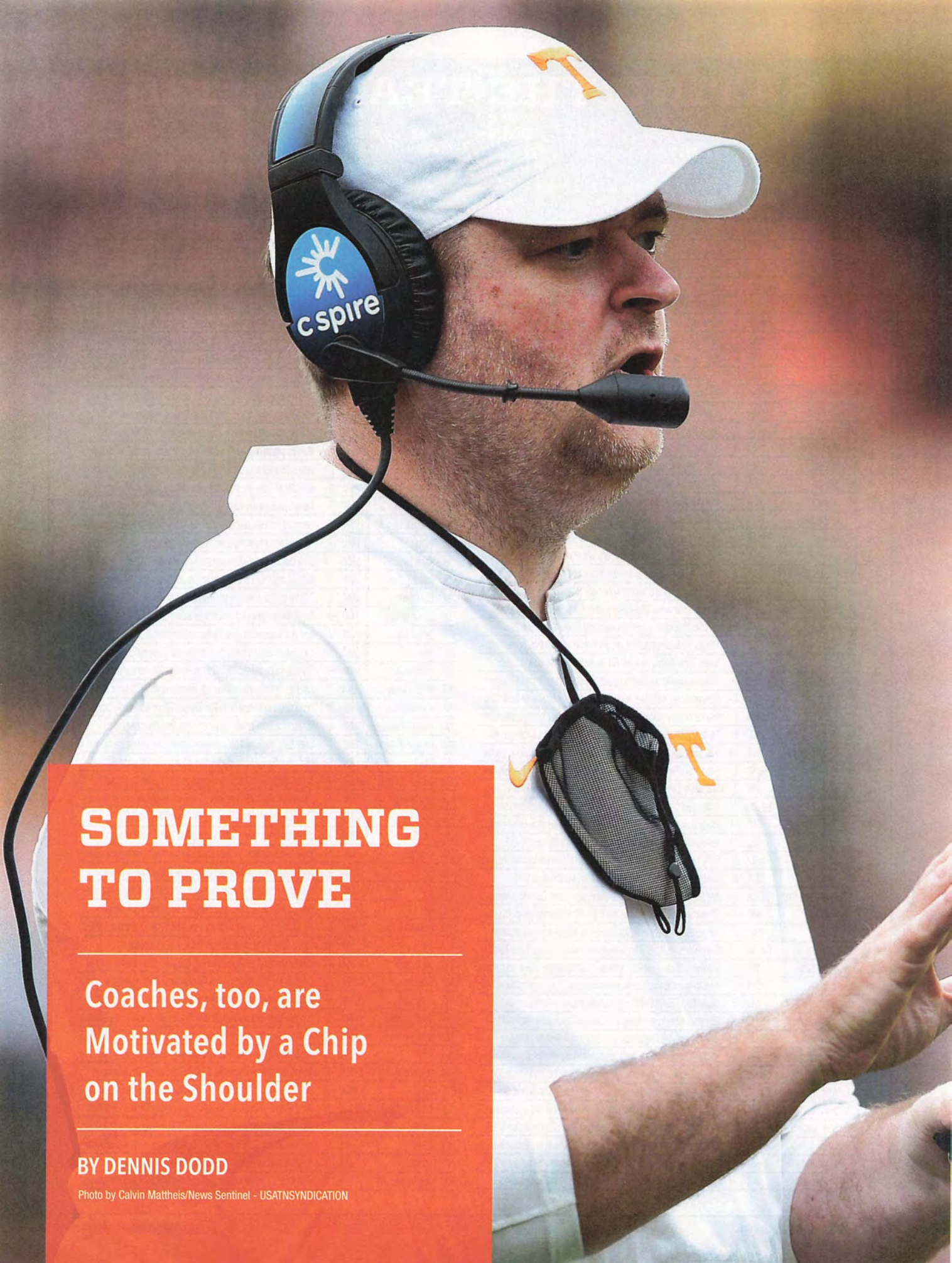
**THE BAD NEWS:** The O-line has experience, but some of those experiences weren't the best kind. The depth was eroded by transfers amid the coaching change, so just a couple of key injuries could be devastating.

**OUR CALL:** Harsin brings a focus on fundamentals as well as a newbie swagger that will build with some early victories before rolling into Penn State for a tone-setter on Sept. 18. Who knows how it will all play out by the time the Tigers face, as he called them "the team up north."

# RATING THE TEAMS 1-130

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Alabama | SEC | 1 | 6. | Texas A&M | SEC | 3 | 11. | Notre Dame | Ind | 1 | 16. | LSU | SEC | 5 | 21. | Penn State | Big Ten | 5 |
| 2. | Clemson | ACC | 1 | 7. | Iowa State | Big 12 | 2 | 12. | Florida | SEC | 4 | 17. | Washington | Pac-12 | 2 | 22. | USC | Pac-12 | 4 |
| 3. | Oklahoma | Big 12 | 1 | 8. | Cincinnati | AAC | 1 | 13. | Wisconsin | Big Ten | 2 | 18. | Iowa | Big Ten | 3 | 23. | Coastal Carolina | Sun Belt | 1 |
| 4. | Georgia | SEC | 2 | 9. | North Carolina | ACC | 2 | 14. | Miami | ACC | 3 | 19. | Arizona State | Pac-12 | 3 | 24. | Texas | Big 12 | 4 |
| 5. | Ohio State | Big Ten | 1 | 10. | Oregon | Pac-12 | 1 | 15. | Oklahoma State | Big 12 | 3 | 20. | Indiana | Big Ten | 4 | 25. | Auburn | SEC | 6 |

| No. | Team | Conf. | Conf. Rank | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 26. | Ole Miss | SEC | 7 | Lane Kiffin, QB Matt Corral ... and an offense made in Rebels heaven. |
| 27. | TCU | Big 12 | 5 | QB Max Duggan now has the experience that Frogs need for Top 25 push. |
| 28. | Michigan | Big Ten | 6 | Wolverines don't scream "elite", but they'll beat the teams they should. |
| 29. | Liberty | Ind | 2 | QB Malik Willis nearly unstoppable for team that went 10-1 last season. |
| 30. | Utah | Pac-12 | 5 | Baylor transfer QB Charlie Brewer takes over for experienced, hungry Utes. |
| 31. | Nevada | MW | 1 | QB Carson Strong leads the push for Pack to reach first MW title game. |
| 32. | Boise State | MW | 2 | Andy Avalos takes over as head coach as Broncos still team to beat in division. |
| 33. | UCF | AAC | 2 | The Gus Bus pulls up in Orlando, and QB Dillon Gabriel ready to hit the gas. |
| 34. | Northwestern | Big Ten | 7 | The Wildcats have won two West titles in three years. Will contend again. |
| 35. | Minnesota | Big Ten | 8 | Gophers' formula: Give the dang ball to RB Mohamed Ibrahim. |
| 36. | Louisiana | Sun Belt | 2 | Nearly everybody returns from a team going for a third division title. |
| 37. | Virginia Tech | ACC | 4 | Justin Fuente looking for a breakthrough season, not merely a good one. |
| 38. | Ball State | MAC | 1 | MAC champs return almost intact after finishing in AP Top 25. |
| 39. | Missouri | SEC | 8 | QB Connor Bazelak's 2020 debut points toward bright future for Tigers. |
| 40. | NC State | ACC | 5 | Lots of production back on both sides for team that went 8-4 last season. |
| 41. | West Virginia | Big 12 | 6 | Neal Brown treading water at 11-11 in two seasons as head coach. |
| 42. | Stanford | Pac-12 | 6 | Cardinal went 4-2 in short 2020 season, looking for a QB in 2021. |
| 43. | Colorado | Pac-12 | 7 | Buffs surprised at 4-2 in Karl Dorrell's first season; ground game is strong. |
| 44. | Kansas State | Big 12 | 7 | Deuce Vaughn is as fun as anybody to watch; K-State remains a tough out. |
| 45. | UCLA | Pac-12 | 8 | Chip Kelly (10-21 at UCLA) could be ready to make his move in Westwood. |
| 46. | Mississippi State | SEC | 9 | Offense could click in Mike Leach's second year — if he picks right QB. |
| 47. | Kentucky | SEC | 10 | RB Chris Rodriguez Jr. leads a deep stable behind a standout OL. |
| 48. | Wake Forest | ACC | 6 | This might surprise you: Deacons are looking for sixth straight bowl trip. |
| 49. | SMU | AAC | 3 | Sonny Dykes looking for a new QB for Air Raid; he has good choices. |
| 50. | Virginia | ACC | 7 | Bronco Mendenhall looking to establish more ground game after 5-5 season. |
| 51. | Florida State | ACC | 8 | This seems low, right? Like, really low? Consider the Noles were 3-6 in 2020. |
| 52. | Nebraska | Big Ten | 9 | Four consecutive seasons without a bowl. Huskers won't make it five, right? |
| 53. | Pitt | ACC | 9 | QB Kenny Pickett decided to come back, giving Panthers a strong leader. |
| 54. | Boston College | ACC | 10 | If BC finds help for QB Phil Jurkovec and standout OL, this pick is too low. |
| 55. | Baylor | Big 12 | 8 | Bears have new QB after Charlie Brewer transferred following 2-7 season. |
| 56. | San Jose State | MW | 3 | Spartans had magical 2020 season, and returns enough pieces for a repeat. |
| 57. | Purdue | Big Ten | 10 | Boilers need to giddy-up after going 5-10 in Big Ten play in past two seasons. |
| 58. | Tennessee | SEC | 11 | Plenty of drama for the resetting Vols as Josh Heupel takes over as coach. |
| 59. | Arkansas | SEC | 12 | Razorbacks were surprisingly competitive in Sam Pittman's Year 1. |
| 60. | Cal | Pac-12 | 9 | Cal is 14-5 when QB Chase Garbers starts and plays more than half the game. |
| 61. | Toledo | MAC | 2 | Loads of experience as Rockets chase first MAC title since 2016. |
| 62. | Appalachian State | Sun Belt | 3 | App State adds transfer QB Chase Brice, gets Coastal Carolina at home. |
| 63. | Memphis | AAC | 4 | The outlook isn't as bright when you have a QB competition going into camp. |
| 64. | BYU | Ind | 3 | The personnel losses were significant, so a step back is to be expected. |
| 65. | Rutgers | Big Ten | 11 | Greg Schiano went 3-6 in his second debut season with the Scarlet Knights. |
| 66. | Fresno State | MW | 4 | Schedule is tough — two Pac-12 teams — but the Bulldogs should reach a bowl. |
| 67. | Marshall | C-USA | 1 | Herd collapsed late last season, prompting a coaching change to Charles Huff. |
| 68. | Tulsa | AAC | 5 | Superstar LB Zaven Collins is gone; bulk of team (6-0 AAC) returns. |
| 69. | Oregon State | Pac-12 | 10 | Beavers improving on offense as it seeks first bowl game since 2013. |
| 70. | Texas Tech | Big 12 | 9 | Tyler Shough, the Oregon transfer, steps in with big-time arm talent. |
| 71. | San Diego State | MW | 5 | Always physical and nasty, but Aztecs need to find a solution at quarterback. |
| 72. | Maryland | Big Ten | 12 | When will results match the good recruiting rankings for this middling program? |
| 73. | Washington State | Pac-12 | 11 | Second season of Nick Rolovich could hinge on who he picks at QB. |
| 74. | Louisville | ACC | 11 | Cardinals trying to show that last season's 4-7 tumble was an aberration. |
| 75. | South Carolina | SEC | 13 | Coaching change required (Shane Beamer) after a hard face-plant to 2-8. |
| 76. | Illinois | Big Ten | 13 | Bret Bielema is back, baby! Too bad games can't be won in press conferences. |
| 77. | Louisiana Tech | C-USA | 2 | Bulldogs will resume role as a conference contender after tumble in 2020. |
| 78. | Georgia Tech | ACC | 12 | QB Jeff Sims gives Jackets hope for the future — 2022 and beyond. |
| 79. | Michigan State | Big Ten | 14 | Spartans seem a long way away from the CFP appearance ... it was just 2015. |
| 80. | Duke | ACC | 13 | Two losing seasons in a row for David Cutcliffe (74-88 in 13 years at Duke). |
| 81. | Ohio | MAC | 3 | Frank Solich still going strong at 76, has team that could win the MAC. |
| 82. | Wyoming | MW | 6 | Xazavian Valladay-led run game can be lethal; Cowboys will have stingy defense. |
| 83. | Arizona | Pac-12 | 12 | New coach Jedd Fisch bringing loads of energy to a hefty rebuilding project. |
| 84. | Tulane | AAC | 6 | Tulane has a solid chance to go to a bowl game for the fourth straight year. |
| 85. | UAB | C-USA | 3 | Blazers have won three consecutive Conference USA West championships. |
| 86. | Buffalo | MAC | 4 | Outlook got downgraded when Lance Leipold left to try to revive Kansas. |
| 87. | Houston | AAC | 7 | Dana Holgorsen sputtering along so far, with a 7-13 record in two seasons. |
| 88. | UTSA | C-USA | 4 | Moving in right direction, especially when RB Sincere McCormick has the ball. |
| 89. | FAU | C-USA | 5 | A subpar passing game may keep the Owls from East Division title. |
| 90. | Hawaii | MW | 7 | Warriors offense ready to fly in second season under coach Todd Graham. |
| 91. | Syracuse | ACC | 14 | Dino Babers needs to get himself a QB after hitting the ACC basement. |
| 92. | Army West Point | Ind | 4 | Black Knights have won at least nine games three times in past four years. |
| 93. | Miami (Ohio) | MAC | 5 | Top offensive players from 2019 MAC title team are nearly all back. |
| 94. | Air Force | MW | 8 | Defensive has been re-fortified, but many new faces on Falcons' offense. |
| 95. | Temple | AAC | 8 | Transfer portal created big roster makeover as Owls try to forget 1-6 season. |
| 96. | Vanderbilt | SEC | 14 | Clark Lea takes over a Commodores team that was winless last season. |
| 97. | Colorado State | MW | 9 | Defense might have to carry the day while offense looks for firepower. |
| 98. | East Carolina | AAC | 9 | ECU not likely to make enough progress for first winning season since 2014. |
| 99. | Central Michigan | MAC | 6 | Coach Jim McElwain led the Chips to division title in 2019; last year: 3-3. |
| 100. | Georgia State | Sun Belt | 4 | Last year's close calls show Panthers can contend in Sun Belt East. |
| 101. | Navy | AAC | 10 | Ken Niumatalolo's team is salty on defense but is hunting for more offense. |
| 102. | Southern Miss | C-USA | 6 | The coaching merry-go-round has ended with Will Hall in charge. |
| 103. | Middle Tennessee | C-USA | 7 | Transfer QB Bailey Hockman solves dilemma of Asher O'Hara's exit. |
| 104. | Arkansas State | Sun Belt | 5 | Could be camp Intrigue in the Red Wolves' QB room after a 4-7 season. |
| 105. | Western Kentucky | C-USA | 8 | Toppers imported prolific QB Bailey Zappe from Houston Baptist. |
| 106. | Western Michigan | MAC | 7 | Kaleb Eleby threw for 18 touchdowns, ran for four in six-game season. |
| 107. | Troy | Sun Belt | 6 | LB Carlton Martial leads effort to turn close losses into close victories. |
| 108. | Georgia Southern | Sun Belt | 7 | Option attack brings back key pieces after Eagles won a bowl game. |
| 109. | New Mexico | MW | 10 | Kentucky transfer QB Terry Wilson arrives to (probably) spark offense. |
| 110. | Kansas | Big 12 | 10 | Lance Leipold inherits a mess, but he's a good fixer-upper. |
| 111. | Kent State | MAC | 8 | QB Dustin Crum returns after winning first-team All-MAC honors. |
| 112. | Utah State | MW | 11 | Blake Anderson takes over after successful coaching run at Arkansas State. |
| 113. | FIU | C-USA | 9 | The Panthers need some of that Butch Davis magic to get back to a bowl. |
| 114. | USF | AAC | 11 | Ended last season on an eight-game skid and didn't win a conference game. |
| 115. | Rice | C-USA | 10 | New OC Marques Tuiasosopo brings in a more wide-open mentality. |
| 116. | Eastern Michigan | MAC | 9 | QB, OL are strengths, but defense was among nation's worst in 2020. |
| 117. | UNLV | MW | 12 | Rebels went 0-6 in coach Marcus Arroyo's debut season. |
| 118. | North Texas | C-USA | 11 | Playmakers at skill positions, solid line, give Mean Green offense potential. |
| 119. | Charlotte | C-USA | 12 | QB Chris Reynolds returns; fixing the defense is 49ers' biggest challenge. |
| 120. | Texas State | Sun Belt | 8 | Bobcats' defense must make up a lot of ground after 2020 struggles. |
| 121. | South Alabama | Sun Belt | 9 | Former South Carolina/Utah QB Jake Bentley will give offense a boost. |
| 122. | Northern Illinois | MAC | 10 | Michigan State transfer Rocky Lombardi won starting QB job in the spring. |
| 123. | UTEP | C-USA | 13 | Dana Dimel brings a 5-27 record into his fourth season with Miners. |
| 124. | Old Dominion | C-USA | 14 | Monarchs are back after taking 2020 off because of COVID concerns. |
| 125. | Akron | MAC | 11 | QB Keto Nelson returns after missing last season due to shoulder surgery. |
| 126. | Louisiana-Monroe | Sun Belt | 10 | Went winless last season, but veteran coach Terry Bowden takes over. |
| 127. | Bowling Green | MAC | 12 | Falcons' offense was historically bad in 2020, averaging just 11.4 points. |
| 128. | UConn | Ind | 5 | Huskies sat out 2020; running back Kevin Mensah is name to remember. |
| 129. | UMass | Ind | 6 | Aggies played two FCS opponents this spring after sitting out fall 2020. |
| 130. | New Mexico State | Ind | 7 | Walt Bell 1-15 in two seasons; Colorado transfer QB Tyler Lytle arrives. |




# SOMETHING TO PROVE

## Coaches, too, are Motivated by a Chip on the Shoulder

BY DENNIS DODD

Photo by Calvin Mattheis/News Sentinel - USATNSYNDICATION

No one likes to be fired.

And when Gus Malzahn was fired for the first time at age 55, it hurt like hell.

"You went through something pretty traumatic," Central Florida athletic director Terry Mohajir told his unemployed coaching prospect. "Are you ready to get back in? Are you OK?"

"He said, 'You better believe it man,'" Mohajir related. "I could feel the fire through the phone."

At Auburn, Malzahn had played for a national championship, won 66 percent of his games, went to three New Year's Six bowls, and had beaten Nick Saban's Alabama three times in his eight seasons. And he was out of a job.

So, yeah, there was a bit of indignation.

"I've always got a chip on my shoulder," Malzahn told reporters, "something to prove."

So, by the time he was introduced as UCF's new coach in February, he was positively gushing. A burden had been lifted. The burden of powerful Auburn boosters looking over his shoulder basically every time he called a play ... was gone.

When the Tigers' former coach took the podium after being named to replace Josh Heupel (who had left for Tennessee), a new coach — and man — had emerged.

Gus joked. Gus gestured. The low-key, almost shy, coach admitted something had changed.

The Gus who was muted most of the time at Auburn was almost talking smack in his new position.

"If the right guy ever got to UCF, and would stay there and build it, everybody else would be in trouble," he said he once told his Auburn staff. "I believe I'm that right now."

Motivation abounds this 2021 offseason. The pandemic that robbed every team of preparation and much of the excitement that goes with playing college football, also cost every program millions of dollars, and when it came right down to it, it cost 11 coaching staffs their jobs.

Of the 17 new head coaches, five had been fired as head coaches at previous stops in their careers.

"The old adage is you've never really coached until you've been fired," said new Texas coach Steve Sarkisian.

Sark was fired at USC in 2015 after public struggles with substance abuse. After a stay in rehab, he re-emerged with Alabama as an analyst, and by 2020 he was the Broyles Award winner (nation's best assistant coach).

How's that for a comeback? Texas gets Sark at the top of his game. At age 46, he is regarded among the game's best play callers ... can he succeed at one of the top 10 head coaching jobs?

"When you experience that (firing) a lot of coaches go one of two ways," Sarkisian said. "It really drove me just to be the best coach I can be.

"I wasn't worried if I would ever be a head coach again. I just wanted to be the best coach, the best version of Steve Sarkisian every day. ... All of the sudden there were opportunities to be a head coach again."

It's part of every coach's DNA to compete. Whether in a rivalry or a blowout in a guarantee game or in recruiting or in building a reputation — or in rebuilding a reputation.

Malzahn could have taken a year or two off doing TV and counting his Auburn buyout money. But there's a reason he took an eight-week deep breath after his firing.

"I got a chance to sit back and re-evaluate things," Malzahn said. "It took me about a week to say, 'I want to coach again.' They're getting the best Gus Malzahn coach than at any point in my career."

Sark won't say it in as many words the way Malzahn will: The burn in the gut is brighter than ever in these guys to show what they can do. To show what they're made of. To succeed when they were told they were no good ... and fired.

"Think of it: Fired from your alma mater," said Arkansas defensive coordinator Barry Odom.

That is exactly what happened to Odom after the 2019 season following 13 years as a Missouri player, grad assistant, assistant and, finally, head coach. Odom rebounded — following a 25-25 record in four seasons — with a bounce-back year as the Hogs' DC.

"If you're a competitor you're going to carry some of those things with you," he added, "which is ... healthy."

That's also what happened to Heupel. The new Tennessee coach was fired by Oklahoma, *his* alma mater in 2015.

Heupel's motivation is rarely witnessed publicly. There are only brief glimpses of the chip on his shoulder the size of Mt. Rushmore. But it is there if you look hard enough, as gaudy as the jeweled ring he earned in quarterbacking Oklahoma to the 2000 national championship.

Amid the subtext of Heupel's hiring at Tennessee was the revenge factor in his new gig. It has been slightly more than six years since Heupel was fired as co-offensive coordinator at OU. At the time in early 2015, at age 36, Heupel was considered one of OU's top assistants, a possible successor to Bob Stoops.

Heupel was Stoops' first and only national championship quarterback. He used that knowledge to tutor Sam Bradford to the 2008 Heisman as the Sooners' quarterbacks coach.

In his memoir *No Excuses*, Stoops called Heupel the most valuable player he had in his 18 years at OU.

**UCF Knights Head Coach Gus Malzahn**

Photo by Mike Watters-USA TODAY Sports

**Florida Gators head coach Dan Mullen talks with Arkansas defensive coordinator Barry Odom before a game.**

Photo by Brad McClenny-USA TODAY NETWORK

"With Josh it especially killed me ...," Stoops wrote. "Firing Josh was (my) worst day ... as the head coach at OU."

Stoops would not comment for this story.

Heupel has new challenges to occupy his attention.

"I understand how Josh feels," said former Kansas coach Mark Mangino, who was OU's offensive coordinator when Heupel was the star quarterback. "But whether he cares or wants to admit it, he's still held in high esteem at Oklahoma. ... If he walked into Memorial Stadium, the fans would jump on their feet. They love him."

Heupel mostly avoided the question of firing-as-motivation at his introductory press conference, when he said merely, "It gave me a chance in some ways to restart."

Heupel restarted as offensive coordinator at Utah State ... then Missouri ... then got his chance to be head coach at UCF when Scott Frost left for Nebraska.

But in 2018 during his first year as UCF's head coach, Heupel told the *Orlando Sentinel*, "Thank God it happened! It's worked out great for me. If I had stayed there, I wouldn't be here."

Now Malzahn takes over for Heupel, and Heupel is running an SEC program after three years at UCF.

But all of it continues to reflect how the entire game — part of all our *lives* — can at times be based on proving someone wrong. It's an inherent element of not only sports' backstage but of the human experience.

Those throughout the competitive food chain let disrespect drive them.

"This is going to be one of the best programs in college football," Malzahn said.

It certainly is going to be entertaining, something Gus wasn't or wasn't allowed to be at Auburn. Malzahn will call all his own plays, which is what got him from Springdale (Ark.) High School to the University of Arkansas in 2006 as offensive coordinator.

At Auburn, whether or not he was calling the plays was sometimes a week-to-week proposition. Gus doubted himself at times. Fans called for change.

Now? He is armed with a veteran quarterback (Dillon Gabriel) who should mesh well with the system. One of the main criticisms of Malzahn at the end was his lack of development of quarterbacks, and he's out to reset that narrative.

"Definitely I'm going to call plays," Malzahn promised. "I'll call plays the rest of my career."

Malzahn's arrival is the best fit of the latest hiring cycle of college football coaches, and quite a get for a program outside the Power 5 conferences.

There is no disgrace going from the SEC to the AAC. Former UCF athletic director Danny White spent six years shaping UCF into a football power that claimed its own national championship and energized Orlando. We know what the Knights can be because we've witnessed it.

UCF is buying in the way it did with George O'Leary, Frost and Heupel. There are billboards measuring the driving distance to "The Future of College Football." It was Malzahn's idea to put the players' twitter handles on the back of their jerseys at the spring game.

"I truly believe we will be in the final four in a short period of time," Malzahn said.

Still, if this works out, Malzahn is probably gone in a few years, but everyone knows that going in. All concerned parties enter this relationship with their eyes wide open. Mohajir is familiar with the situation, having Malzahn as his coach at Arkansas State in 2012.

Malzahn stayed one season, his first as a college head coach, and Mohajir had to find a replacement. Bryan Harsin lasted one season for him at Arkansas State, too.

Note that Malzahn is not a losing coach (68-35 in eight seasons at Auburn). He just didn't win *enough* for Auburn. The expectations are different at UCF, less maddening than the SEC West.

Then again, this could also just be who Malzahn is for the remainder of his career: an energetic offensive mastermind still in his prime chasing New Year's Six and College Football Playoff berths near Disney World. If both entities stay in their current relationship, think of the ceiling for UCF as the CFP is likely to expand.

Meanwhile, Heupel is just reaching his coaching prime. His record includes an American Athletic Conference title and Fiesta Bowl appearance as well as two seasons of at least 10 wins.

It's clear by now Heupel didn't fail at OU. Injuries and turnovers — 17 in the final seven games of 2014 — did him in. At the end of that 8-5 season, Oklahoma finished unranked after a bowl loss for only the second time in Stoops' 18 years.

Now, he's at Tennessee, historically one of the best and currently most challenging coaching assignments in the country.

"It worked out perfect for him because some really big-name people wouldn't touch it because of the situation," Mangino said.

Tennessee's situation is one mired in an NCAA investigation regarding possible major violations. For that reason, even though Vols fans expected a well-established replacement for Jeremy Pruitt, when White arrived from UCF, he hired the same guy he had hired three years earlier at UCF.

Now Heupel can harness that chip on his shoulder in Knoxville to try to bring some gridiron glory back to a program that has been largely adrift for nearly two decades.

But the chip on a coach's shoulder doesn't always stem from being fired. There are a lot of revenge tours this season, coaches wanting to prove themselves after some sort of real or perceived slight.

Even Dabo Swinney, who is flying high these days, let it fly last season more than he ever has. He ripped Florida State when that game was postponed hours before kickoff because a Clemson backup offensive lineman tested positive. He famously questioned Ohio State's limited schedule during a pandemic by voting the Buckeyes No. 11 in the final regular-season coaches poll.

Just as coaches use motivational ploys to get players fired up, they can't help but have their own ire stoked at times.

It's college football. Layer competitiveness on top of ego on top of money and somebody is always getting screwed, oppressed, disrespected ... or all three.

Rebounding from being fired as a head coach can be a long, arduous process. Sometimes another opportunity presents itself quickly (as for Malzahn), but more times than not, it takes years.

It's essentially a reboot, with no guarantees that another chance will ever come along. And if it does, making good on another chance requires an extra measure of grit, overcoming the doubters and growing as a coach.

The newish route of "analyst" that Saban instituted at Alabama has led to a number of former head coaches gaining perspective and rejuvenating their careers. Now Terry Bowden has accomplished much the same thing through Swinney's program at Clemson (getting back into head coaching at Louisiana-Monroe).

Other former head coaches are going the coordinator route, such as Odom at Arkansas, Kyle Flood (at Texas), Rich Rodriguez (at La.-Monroe) and Mike Stoops (Florida Atlantic), among others.

Getting a good chance and making good on it is another matter entirely.

"There is a chip on the shoulder of all of us," Odom said. "Everybody has scars."

## SCARRED BUT UNBOWED

These current head coaches go into 2021 knowing what it feels like to get fired as a head coach. But after they jump-started their careers, they understand how it works and how they have to continually prove themselves ... coaching with a chip on their shoulder.

**BRET BIELEMA, ILLINOIS**

Wildly successful at Wisconsin, not at Arkansas, he was fired in 2017 after five seasons as head Hog and spent three years as an NFL assistant before Illinois called in January.

**TERRY BOWDEN, LOUISIANA-MONROE**

After being dumped after seven years at Akron, spent 2019-20 as grad intern at Clemson; now has his sixth HC job (notably 47-17-1 at Auburn in '90s).

**MACK BROWN, NORTH CAROLINA**

Forced to resign after 16 years at Texas, he's showing he's a long way from being done.

**MARIO CRISTOBAL, OREGON**

When six-year stint at FIU ended in 2012, spent four years as Alabama assistant before moving to Northwest.

**DANA DIMEL, UTEP**

After being fired after three years at Houston in 2002, spent time at Arizona as Rob Gronkowski's position coach, returned to K-State as an assistant and got another chance in 2018 at downtrodden UTEP.

**SONNY DYKES, SMU**

After four years as a bad fit at California, he was fired at end of 2016. After a year as TCU offensive analyst, he was hired by SMU.

**BRADY HOKE, SAN DIEGO STATE**

Success turning around Ball State and San Diego State did not translate to big wins at Michigan, which fired him after four years (31-20); five years as an assistant later, he's back coaching the Aztecs.

**BUTCH JONES, ARKANSAS STATE**

After being fired at Tennessee (2017), he went the Alabama-analyst route for two seasons, leading to his fourth HC gig starting this season.

**LANE KIFFIN, MISSISSIPPI**

First three HC jobs (Oakland Raiders, Tennessee, USC) ended badly, but three years as Alabama OC sent him on his way to FAU and now Ole Miss.

**MIKE LOCKSLEY, MARYLAND**

Flamed out as New Mexico HC; returned to coaching OL, and after three years as Alabama assistant, Maryland hired him as HC in 2019.

**GUS MALZAHN, UCF**

Getting fired (from Auburn) is traumatic, even when you don't have to wait long for another chance. Having a 77-38 career record can do that for a guy.

**JIM MCELWAIN, CENTRAL MICHIGAN**

Soared at Colorado State, but was fired in third season at Florida (22-12); spent a season as Michigan assistant before taking over at CMU.

**STEVE SARKISIAN, TEXAS**

Damaged by the end of his experience at USC, bounced back calling plays at Bama, now getting to run his own program again.

**Texas Head Coach Steve Sarkisian**

Photo by Scott Wachter-USA TODAY Sports

# THE GREATEST OF ALL TIME

## Can't argue with Nick Saban's seven National Championships

BY ANTHONY GIMINO

Photo by USA TODAY Sports

As Nick Saban and his family arrived at the Tuscaloosa Regional Airport, with chants of "Roll Tide!" filling the air, he quickly walked over to greet the already-adoring fans.

It was January 3, 2007.

Alabama athletic director Mal Moore's 38-day search for a head coach had finally landed the big fish after the Crimson Tide had endured four blah years of Mike Shula, which had followed the non-starting tenure of Mike Price, the over-before-you-knew it two years of Dennis Franchione and the Mike DuBose era, which ended ingloriously in NCAA sanctions.

As the story goes, as Saban approached a Crimson-clad woman on that day in early January, she screamed out, "Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Nick Saban!"

She had that right.

So did Moore.

"When I set out on this search," he said that day, "I noted that I was seeking a coach who has a proven record of championship success and achievement.

"Coach Saban brings that proven record of accomplishment and leadership to our program. The hiring of Coach Saban signifies a new era of Crimson Tide football and affirms our commitment to provide our student-athletes and fans with a leader who will continue our commitment to excellence across the board."

Alabama fans were dreaming again of championships ... but neither Moore nor the most frenzied of fans would have sworn on a houndstooth hat that there would be this many titles, this fast — that just 14 years later, Saban would need six fingers to show off all his shiny national championship rings at Alabama.

2009. 2011. 2012. 2015. 2017. And with a win over Ohio State in last season's title game in Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Fla. ... 2020.

With his seven national titles, including in 2003 with LSU, Saban stands alone. He had been tied with Alabama legend Paul "Bear" Bryant with six championships after beating Georgia in the 2017 College Football Playoff title game in a game for the ages.

Saban. The best ever. The GOAT.

"Sometimes, we sit around and talk about, 'We're really playing for the greatest coach ever and we just get to be a part of it,'" former Alabama tailback Damien Harris said in 2018. "We get to watch it up close and personal.

"It's been a true honor, and I'm thankful to have been a part of everything that he's doing for this program."

### WHAT MAKES SABAN SO SUCCESSFUL?

Greg Byrne, whose father Bill Byrne was a longtime athletic director, was once asked about what it was like to work with a football coach like Saban.

"I've worked with coaches my entire life, and to get to work with a guy like Nick Saban is really interesting, to say the least, in a very positive way. His focus, his drive ... the guy plans every minute of the day out," said Byrne, hired as Alabama's athletic director in 2017 after seven years as the AD at Arizona.

"I don't live too far from him and I can tell you exactly what time he is going to be leaving the house and the structure and the discipline he has throughout the year. There's a reason why he has been so successful. It's interesting, too, the amount of leaders — sometimes around our country, but even around the world at times — who are intrigued by him and want to learn from him.

"And so I try to learn from him, too, throughout the process. Being able to talk to Nick Saban about those things is something I feel really fortunate for."

Saban's attention to detail, his passion, his relentless devotion to The Process — "Do your job!" — is well-documented. Byrne told a story that illustrates Saban in action, that helps explain why Nick Saban is, well, Nick Saban.

"That's something I think about quite a bit and get to watch," Byrne said.

"I'll give you an example. He's a great teacher. A lot of college football coaches when they have their summer camps, they'll show up for a half hour each day and give the kids a talk, maybe wave at them, sign a few autographs.

"It was June, and by this time a lot of coaches are out playing golf, kind of recharging their batteries. My office here overlooks our football practice fields. Well, we have a seventh and eighth-grade camp going on, so we have 500 kids out on our practice fields.

"I'm on a conference call overlooking our practice fields, and I'm kind of watching through the window trying to pass the time

Photo by USA TODAY Sports

on the call, and I see this guy in the middle of these seventh- and eighth-graders with a straw hat on, which is what Nick Saban wears on the practice field.

"And he is running around and he is coaching them and he is teaching these kids like they're his own team, with the same level of intensity and the same level of drive. A lot of coaches just use (camps) as a revenue-generator for the program, which is an important part of it — but he's using it like he's coaching them up for the national championship, and I think that's part of what makes him who he is."

## JUST THE FACTS

• Including last season's final AP poll, the Tide has spent 99 weeks as the nation's top-ranked team over the past 13 seasons. The next-best team is Clemson at 23.

• Alabama has been ranked No. 1 at some point in 13 consecutive seasons, the longest in the history of the AP poll.

• Saban is 66-17 against teams ranked in the AP Top 25 since the start of the 2008 season. He has 90 career wins vs. ranked teams in the AP poll.

• Saban is 33-11 against Top 10 teams since the start of the 2008 season.

• Saban has 27 career wins over Top 5 teams, the most of any coach ever.

• Under Saban, Alabama has won 98 consecutive games against unranked teams.

• From Saban's first full recruiting class in 2008 through the 2021 class, he landed 58 five-star recruits, according to the 247Sports Composite rankings. The next-best team is Georgia with 42.

• Alabama had the top-rated recruiting class in each year from 2011 to 2017. The Tide landed another No. 1 class in 2019, was No. 2 in 2020 and had another best-in-nation class in 2021, further proof that Saban shows no signs of slowing down.

• Saban has produced 39 first-round draft picks at Alabama, including four each in 2011, 2012, 2017, 2018, 2020 and 6 in 2021. The total of 39 is, by far, the most in the country. The next best is Ohio State at 22. Think of it this way, Saban has turned out 14 more first-rounders at Alabama than Oklahoma (10), Michigan (9) and Auburn (6) combined in the same period of time.

• Saban last year became the first college head coach in the NFL's common draft era to produce a first-round pick at every non-specialist position.

• Alabama didn't have anyone drafted in 2007, Saban's first season, a reflection on the previous coaching staff. Since then, Alabama has averaged 7.5 draft picks per year.

"Alabama has always had the name brand, recognition, the historical tradition," former Senior Bowl director Phil Savage told *Lindy's* contributor Christopher Walsh.

"It always resonates with people, but I also think that it was just a stop on the circuit (for scouts). There was not a lot of distinction between going to Alabama versus Tennessee, Auburn or Georgia. It was just one of the stops.

"Once Nick Saban got there, honestly in the Southeast it has become the stop."

• This is really crazy: Alabama has produced 41 consensus All-Americans since 2008, spanning 13 seasons. That's more than three per season. That's what happens when you take the best recruiting and add the best coaching.

As with the first-round draft picks under Saban, the second-best team is eating Bama's dust. Oklahoma is second in All-Americans with "just" 16.

• Alabama players have won three Heisman trophies under Saban — Mark Ingram Jr. in 2009, Derrick Henry in 2015 and DeVonta Smith in 2020.

• And, of course, the six national titles.

All of these fantastic numbers happen when coaches and players are focused on The Process, rather than the opponent or the score or what happened on the last play.

"Well, I think what we try to get our players to do is play to a standard, be the best version of themselves," Saban said.

"I often times get on our players, even when we win and people don't totally understand that, because regardless of what the scoreboard says, how did you really perform?

"Did you perform to your best of your ability? Did you create the best value for yourself and for the team by the way you execute the discipline that you played with, how you were able to focus on the next play, not get frustrated with something that was difficult for you?

"All these things create an internal standard that we're trying to get players to play to ... it's about your level of performance."

## THE EVER-CHANGING SABAN

Saban has a stoic image — he makes headlines when he smiles after a game or at a press conference. Toughness and discipline are hallmarks of his coaching style, as exemplified by this story from former Alabama safety Rashad Johnson, who began his career as a walk-on running back under Mike DuBose before Saban walked through that door.

"When we were in the Fourth Quarter (conditioning) program and going through some things, my shirt came out of my shorts. Our shirts had to be tucked in when we were working out, and Coach Saban jumped me, 'Put your shirt in, who do you think you are?'" Johnson recalled.

"It was that moment of, 'Oh wow.' My shirt, it just came out from working out; I really didn't have a chance to tuck it back in. But he didn't care. 'This is the way it has to be done and it's going to be that way.'

"In the end, you're going to thank him for it because it only made us a better team and it made us all better men. He taught us accountability. He taught us how to go through adversity, and tough times, and come out greater on the other side of it."

Yeah, do it his way or else, but he isn't so stubborn that "his way" is set in concrete.

Saban's early teams were mostly about otherworldly-defense and a game-control, grind-it-out running game. Wins in the biggest games often came via a sledgehammer.

As the seasons went on, Saban matched — and exceeded — the national trends — updating his defense with smaller, quicker personnel to match opposing spread attacks while continuing to roll out new operating systems on offense.

No huddle. Up tempo. Fling the ball all over the yard. Recruit a kid like Tua Tagovailoa. Average more than 49 points in the 2020 regular season.

It's all like Tiger Woods revamping his swing while he's in the middle of winning majors.

"We would out-physical you, run it right down your throat, 4 or 5 yards a play, nothing you can do about it," Mike Johnson, a 2009 All-American on Alabama's offensive line, once told *USA Today*. "Now, it's, 'Let's see if we can wear you out by going five wide and running past you.'

"It's a whole different team, a whole different system. Every time I watch, I see just a different wrinkle."

All of which helps make Saban the Greatest Of All Time.

"Coach Saban is the best to ever do it," Harris told reporters before the 2019 title game.

"There's nothing that I can say that can do it justice and give him more praise than he already deserves. He's the best football mind that's ever been in the game."

While the trophy case overflows — and Saban's collection of national championship rings reaches seven — he doesn't spend much time pondering the significance of it all.

"That doesn't really enter into my mind. I don't ever even think about that at all," he said before the 2020 title game. "I do think a lot about trying to make and help this team to be the best possible — and to put them in the best possible position to have a chance to be successful."

Mission accomplished.

And on Jan. 11, he turned the page and started working on title No. 8.

Photo by Mark J. Rebilas-USA TODAY Sports

# MORE THAN JUST 'NEON DEION'

## Deion Sanders on a mission at Jackson State to boost HBCU

BY DENNIS DODD

Photo by Eric Shelton/Clarion Ledger - USATNSYNDICATION

What does Deion Sanders need with coaching?

We know him best as the lockdown, showboating, gum-flapping, du-rag-wearing Super Bowl-winning corner who long ago became his own brand.

He is one of those guys who backed up his smack with his play whether it be in one-on-one coverage or NFL Network analysis. There's a certain new-age cool respect at work there.

Was this coaching thing just another way for him to stay in the spotlight?

This is a guy who seemed more likely to host a variety show than a 7:30 a.m. staff meeting.

But a midseason spring Zoom visit to his Jackson State office revealed Deion was indeed serious about this coaching gig.

What *is* his title these days — "Coach?" "Coach Deion?" "Coach Sanders?"

Whatever happened to "Prime Time?"

"Prime," Sanders said. "'Coach Prime' is what they call me."

Yes, they do. It's even written on his game-day gear.

The NFL commissioned one of his old Atlanta Falcons jerseys be altered to include a "Coach Prime" label to welcome him to the profession. The title is also a brand being marketed to the world.

You would expect nothing less from Neon Deion. Whoops, there's another nickname, but if there is one Hall of Fame defender who can back it all up it's Coach Prime.

Not many defenders were better. Not many athletes have ever craved attention this badly.

After a career in the limelight, Sanders arguably took a hard turn toward obscurity last year when he agreed to coach Jackson State, a moribund FCS program in Mississippi's state capital.

And he's doing it for the right reasons. The uber star who made it two Super Bowls and a World Series while playing nine MLB seasons, came back to resurrect HBCU football.

Historically black college football has been on the wane for a while, basically since college football was integrated in the early 1970s. USC, with a talented integrated roster featuring Sam Cunningham, walked into Alabama in 1970 and beat the Crimson Tide.

That changed Bear Bryant's mind about playing African-Americans in the Deep South. It also led to a gradual, inexorable talent drain from those black colleges.

Consider that HBCUs, which produced all-time greats such as Walter Payton (Jackson State), Jerry Rice (Mississippi Valley State), Deacon Jones (Texas Southern), Bob Hayes (Florida A&M), and the list goes on … had no players drafted by the NFL in 2021.

According to HBCUgameday.com, only LaChavious Simmons of Tennessee State (seventh round in 2020) has been drafted in the past two years. No HBCU player has been selected in nine of the past 20 drafts.

Sanders intends to reverse that trend. His first recruiting class — laden with FBS transfers — was ranked No. 1 in the FCS.

"It usually takes me all week to return all the calls," Sanders said during that Zoom. "I just checked my phone yesterday and I see Andy Reid, 'Congratulations on the win.' … You can see right now there are probably 1, 2, 3 cameras on me right now. We're doing a documentary as well."

His first season was a COVID-shortened six-game season in which the Tigers finished 3-3.

Sanders wouldn't be the first whose playing exploits outstripped his coaching chops. Ask Bart Starr (under .500 as Packers coach) or Mike Singletary (18-22 as 49ers coach).

Grambling star Doug Williams followed Eddie Robinson at his alma mater, winning four conference titles but will forever be remembered for winning a Super Bowl with the Redskins.

Jim Harbaugh might be the most notable success story among former players, just don't tell Michigan fans. While Harbaugh has been successful everywhere he's been, he has yet to win the division, the Big Ten or beat Ohio State. It's tough at the top — or trying to make it there.

Sanders, meanwhile, is not adopting the look of a typical coach. Try to imagine a Power 5 coach sitting behind a desk wearing a gold chain with what looks like a gold-plated whistle.

But nothing about him as ever been typical. His look fits as snug as Neon Deion's coverage in his, well, prime. Recruits are flocking; folks are getting on board (including in-state colleague Mike Leach) and it's got the potential to be as wonderful as when Sanders danced his way to another pick-six.

He points out he has previous experience coaching his sons in high school, but this is different.

"Financially … I'm complete," Coach Prime reminded us.

This is a football and entertainment icon on a humanitarian journey. That mission: Reestablishing the football presence of HBCUs, most of which are in the South.

Historically black colleges were established in the 19th century because black students weren't welcome at institutions of higher learning. Schools like Grambling, Southern, Florida A&M and Bethune-Cookman flourished in football even though major programs — today's FBS schools — began to siphon off that talent.

Although Sanders was a two-time All-American at superpower Florida State, he felt an obligation.

That included asking questions like, why can't an HBCU program go to a bowl?

"Why couldn't we go to a bowl sponsored by this particular water brand?" Sanders said

## LINDY'S ALL-TIME HBCU TEAM

**OFFENSE**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| QB | Doug Williams | Grambling State (1974-77) |
| RB | Walter Payton | Jackson State (1971-75) |
| RB | Leroy Kelly | Morgan State (1960-64) |
| WR | Bob Hayes | Florida A&M (1960-64) |
| WR | Jerry Rice | Mississippi Valley State (1981-84) |
| TE | Shannon Sharpe | Savannah State (1987-90) |
| OL | Jackie Slater | Jackson State (1972-76) |
| OL | Larry Little | Bethune-Cookman (1964-68) |
| OL | Roosevelt Brown | Morgan State (1949-1952) |
| OL | Art Shell | Maryland Eastern Shore (1964-68) |
| OL | Rayfield Wright | Fort Valley State (1963-67) |

**DEFENSE**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| DL | Deacon Jones | South Carolina State (1958-60) |
| DL | Michael Strahan | Texas Southern (1989-92) |
| DL | Buck Buchanan | Grambling State (1959-63) |
| DL | Ed "Too Tall" Jones | Tennessee State (1970-74) |
| LB | Harry Carson | South Carolina State (1972-75) |
| LB | Robert Brazile | Jackson State (1972-75) |
| LB | Willie Lanier | Morgan State (1963-67) |
| DB | Willie Brown | Grambling State (1987-91) |
| DB | Ken Houston | Prairie View A&M (1963-66) |
| DB | Donnie Shell | South Carolina State (1971-74) |
| DB | Aeneas Williams | Southern (1987-91) |

All are members of the NFL Hall of Fame

holding a bottle up to the screen. "Don't tell us what we can't do when it's a choice by someone who has a lot of money. I don't like someone that hasn't even been to a bowl game telling someone who has been to four at Florida State about a bowl. I know what a bowl is."

In a way, then, it IS about the money. It's about the way money has not flowed to HBCUs ... but still can.

Tackling such an obligation does not necessarily include this experience fitting in as a steppingstone to a better job.

"Big-time coaches like that think about being in the big time," Sanders said. "I've played in a Super Bowl and a World Series. I'm good. I just want to really make things better wherever I'm at."

Coach Prime has certainly proved he can recruit. That No. 1 FCS recruiting class included No. 1 JC cornerback (De'Jahn Warren) who decommitted from Georgia. Eight other Power 5 players transferred, including Sanders' son Shiloh from South Carolina. Another son, Shedeur, is a four-star quarterback.

If Sanders can get those recruits and the world to notice, who's to know what's next?

Imagine Sanders taking over at a Power 5. It can't be emphasized enough: There remains a dearth of minority coaches at the top. This coach has suspended what would surely be a cushy career as an analyst and brand ambassador to prove himself as a crusading coach.

For now, to get to Coach Prime, you have to go through SMAC Entertainment. They arrange his interviews. SMAC is a Santa Monica, California-based talent management agency that reps the likes of Wiz Khalifa, Erin Andrews, Tony Gonzalez and Michael Strahan. Snoop Dogg's "Joker's Wild" is one of SMAC's TV productions.

All of the glitz looks a bit misplaced at an FCS program that once boasted Walter Payton. There hasn't been a winning season since 2013. During the season-opener, Porta Potties had to be trucked in because of water issues resulting from February's extreme cold snap.

About 11,000 spectators came to watch in 44,000-seat Mississippi Veterans Memorial Stadium. They got a look at the Sanders show. Before the game former teammate Troy Aikman pulled up in a limo to support his friend.

"I hadn't seen him in forever," Sanders said.

The show really came after the game. Sanders seemed to hijack the moment complaining he'd been robbed of personal effects left in the locker room during the game. While there were conflicting reports whether stuff was stolen or misplaced, that was the postgame headline instead of being about the players.

**Head coach Deion Sanders and his son, Shedeur Sanders, take a look at the scoreboard during JSU's game against Alabama A&M.**

Photo by Eric Shelton/Clarion Ledger - USATNSYNDICATION

"I didn't make it about the stolen items," Sanders said. "I have two kids on the team. This is the first time the kids have seen daddy robbed. So how do I address that with my kids? ... How do you provoke change when you slide it up under the rug, when you know everybody dealing with the problem, but you're the only one with the balls to say it?"

Following the game, Grambling coach Broderick Fobbs took a shot at Sanders saying, "For us, it's not about the sideshow and all the other stuff, the bells and whistles."

"I never said I didn't respect him," Fobbs said later.

Too late. Coach Prime already had been triggered.

"I laughed and I smiled," Sanders said. "I don't really hold those guys (rival coaches) accountable. They don't know what they're getting into. They haven't received the type of attention from media before so they get disturbed."

Consider that Mississippi is now a state that contains Lane Kiffin, Leach and Prime Time. Imagine the revenue produced if Jackson State were able to wedge its way into playing Ole Miss and Mississippi State.

Sadly, no games are scheduled. Yet.

"We'd love to play anybody when we're ready," Sanders said. "I don't know if we're ready right now."

What, Coach Prime talking something less than smack?

That shows just how real he is about this.

# DIFFERENT CAREER PATHS TO COACHING IN FCS FOR FORMER PLAYERS

Becoming a head coach at the FBS level is usually a matter of starting at the bottom, working your way up and then getting your shot — the typical paying-your-dues scenario of the workplace.

At the FCS level, that's generally true, but not always.

Deion Sanders isn't the only former NFL star whose name recognition (and good intentions) have helped open doors. Here are some other FCS coaches you might recognize from their playing days:

## EDDIE GEORGE, TENNESSEE STATE

The 1995 Heisman Trophy winner at Ohio State went on to amass 10,441 career rushing yards in the NFL (mostly with the Titans) and, after dabbling on stage in the Broadway hit musical *Chicago*, is on the sideline for the first time. Tennessee State hired him in April and he told ESPN he was inspired by what Sanders is doing at Jackson State, another historically black university.

"Living in this community for well over 25 years, I'm well aware of Tennessee State's rich history," George said. "I said, you know this could be a wonderful opportunity."

## ED MCCAFFREY, NORTHERN COLORADO

The 1998 Pro Bowl receiver spent 13 seasons in the NFL, catching 565 passes for 7,422 yards and 55 touchdowns and collecting three Super Bowl rings — one with the 49ers and two with the Broncos.

The former Stanford All-American spent 2018 and 2019 as the head coach at Valor Christian High School in Colorado — where his sons Christian, Max, Dylan and Luke were star players — before being hired by UNC in December 2019, where he is still waiting to play a game, thanks to the pandemic.

## AUTRY DENSON, CHARLESTON SOUTHERN

After finishing his Notre Dame career in 1998 as the leading rusher in school history (4,318 yards), he was Tampa Bay's seventh-round draft choice, and knocked around the NFL for four seasons.

He began his coaching career in high school in 2010, then worked his way up for eight years (Bethune-Cookman, Miami of Ohio and Notre Dame) before taking the head coaching job at Charleston Southern in 2019. He's breaking even so far — 8-8 in two seasons.

## TYRONE WHEATLEY, MORGAN STATE

The former Michigan running back who spent 10 seasons with the New York Giants and Oakland Raiders, gaining nearly 5,000 yards, is another player who climbed the ladder. Before being hired at Morgan State in 2019, he started as a high school coach, and spent a decade as a college and pro assistant.

He needed an assistant, so he brought in Jacoby Jones, a nine-year pro who starred for the Ravens in Super Bowl XLVII, when he scored on a 109-yard kickoff return and a 56-yard reception.

## MIKE MINTER, CAMPBELL

After helping Nebraska win the 1994 and 1995 national titles, the safety was a second-round pick of the Carolina Panthers, where he spent 10 seasons before retiring with a team-record 141 starts. He has been the Fighting Camels head coach since 2013 after spending a year as an assistant at Johnson C. Smith of Division II, and a year on the staff of Nebraska teammate Turner Gill at Liberty.

## KERWIN BELL, WESTERN CAROLINA

The SEC Player in the Year for Florida in 1984 and All-SEC quarterback in '86, he spent a decade between NFL and CFL rosters before moving into coaching in 2000. Was also head coach at Jacksonville (2007-2015) and Valdosta State (2016-18), and the OC at South Florida in 2019 before spending a season as analyst at his alma mater. He was hired at Western Carolina in late January.

## CHRIS VILLARRIAL, SAINT FRANCIS (PA.)

After playing at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, where he received the Jim Langer Award as Best Lineman in Division II, he spent a decade in the NFL as an All-Pro with the Chicago Bears and Buffalo Bills. He spent two years as a high school assistant and then a year as Saint Francis offensive coordinator before becoming head coach in 2010. Now he's the winningest coach in the program's history.

## TROY TAYLOR, SACRAMENTO STATE

A former star quarterback at Cal, he became the Jets' fourth-round draft pick in 1990 and spent just two years in the NFL before returning home. In Sacramento, he helped out as offensive coordinator at Casa Roble High, caught the coaching bug, and has been at it ever since. Two decades later, he became Sac State head coach in 2019. His first team went 9-4 and he won the Eddie Robinson Award.

## BERNARD CLARK, ROBERT MORRIS

The MVP of the 1988 Orange Bowl (14 tackles, 12 unassisted) when Miami took down top-ranked Oklahoma, 20-14, for the first of two national titles in his career as a Hurricane. After becoming a third-round draft pick, he spent two seasons in the NFL (Bengals, Seahawks), and then turned to coaching. Two decades as an assistant led him to becoming head coach of the Colonials in 2018.

## SAM WASHINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA A&T

A cornerback who lined up against teammate Jerry Rice at Mississippi Valley State in the early '80s, he spent four seasons with the Pittsburgh Steelers (had six interceptions in 1984) before spending 20 years as a college assistant. He became head coach at North Carolina A&T in 2018, immediately leading the Aggies to successive BCU national championships.

## DALE LINDSEY, SAN DIEGO

The 78-year-old legend was an All-America linebacker at Western Kentucky before playing for the Cleveland Browns (1965-72), where his teammates included Jim Brown and Lou Groza. After his 111 career NFL games, he became the Browns' linebackers coach and spent more than three decades as a pro football assistant before becoming Toreros' head coach in 2013. He's built a 64-19 record there.

**Eddie George**
Tennessee State

Photo by George Walker IV/The Tennessean - USATNSYNDICATION

# CHALLENGING ALABAMA 24/7/365

## Bryan Harsin takes over at Auburn, ready to challenge "a team up north"

**BY DENNIS DODD** Photo by John Reed-USA TODAY Sports

Something tells us Bryan Harsin is not going to be intimidated by life in the SEC.

When the former Boise State coach was hired to replace Gus Malzahn at Auburn, it didn't take long for him to identify his new priorities.

"You've got a team up north that's doing a great job," Harsin said, declining to use the words "University of Alabama."

"Well, someone has to come here and figure out a way to compete with them. I know Gus (Malzahn) did a good job here, but things change and that's just the nature of it. We've got to compete in all areas."

That "team up north" line got all kinds of reaction when it first hit social media in February. Not so much for embracing the Alabama rivalry with brass, but for taking geographic liberties. Tuscaloosa is actually *northwest* of Auburn.

Whatever. These are the heady first days for a Boise, Idaho, native and former Boise State quarterback who has spent all but three years of his coaching career west of the Rockies, settling onto The Plains.

"I've been here 55 days," Harsin commented after taking the job. "I absolutely love this place. We haven't played a game. I know we haven't done anything. We're all undefeated. But I'm very excited about being here."

Of course he is. Auburn, Ala., will do that to you. And this is the part of the job known as the honeymoon.

Harsin is still just months into the most unique aspect of guiding the Tigers — going up against Alabama 24/7/365. That's not for everybody.

For now, there are no losses to explain, whether they be games or recruiting battles or whatever conflict social media can dream up just for pure entertainment.

It can be argued Malzahn did a *great* job against Alabama, beating Nick Saban three times. Playing in the 2013 National Championship Game. A .660 winning percentage.

But there is also a reason he isn't still the coach. Decoding Auburn can be complicated.

Harsin has yet to experience Toomer's Corner being rolled. He knows Harvey Updyke poisoned those trees, but like a lot of us outsiders, it's hard to comprehend the, *well*, passion.

In his eight years as a college head coach, Harsin hasn't revealed much about himself. Helluva coach, offensive guy, quarterback guru ... but who IS this Idaho native taking over the Auburn franchise?

Some of that anonymity may have to do with the remote outposts where he worked — Arkansas State and Boise State.

Still, the "Team up north" label for Alabama? In a league whose followers don't let anything go unnoticed, that's juicy. Harsin's Auburn could get interesting real fast.

He isn't the first SEC coach to come from outside the conference's geographic footprint, but he is one of the latest. The 44-year old looked like a lifer at Boise State. Since his freshman year in college, Harsin has spent 17 of the next 27 years as either a Boise State player (quarterback, 1995-1999) or coach.

If that was the picture of a lifer, it wasn't a bad one. Harsin arrives on The Plains as the ninth-winningest active FBS head coach (with more than one year experience), having won 76 percent of his games. The issue with that stat is Harsin will now play three coaches annually with a better career winning percentage (Texas A&M's Jimbo Fisher .768; Georgia's Kirby Smart, .788; and Saban, .800).

Welcome to the SEC, Bry.

When asked if he always fancied a shot in the Strength Everywhere Conference, Harsin hedged. "No and yes," he said. Sure, every coach would love to be in the SEC one day. But as Chris Petersen's offensive coordinator at Boise from 2006-2010, he watched his boss routinely get job offers, and understood the grass isn't always greener.

"Somebody would walk in and say 'so-and-so wants to talk to you.' It was so casual we were so open and transparent. We'd be in there literally (drawing up) plays and Pete would say, 'No,'" Harsin said.

"When I got the coordinator job and had success at Boise, there were conversations (with other schools) every year."

Mack Brown persuaded Harsin to move to Texas as co-offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach in 2011. The Horns finished seventh and sixth in Big 12 total offense in Harsin's two seasons, and he became head coach at Arkansas State.

After one season in Jonesboro, Ark., he was tapped to replace Petersen at Boise in 2014 when "Pete" went to Washington.

He succeeded a legend — and succeeded. The native son who had been the OC when Boise beat Oklahoma in that legendary Statue of Liberty Fiesta Bowl. Yeah, that could be fun to watch at Auburn.

As head coach, Harsin went 71-22 in seven seasons, winning three Mountain West titles and having his team from the relative sticks annually ranked in the Top 25.

Harsin has the same stoicism as Petersen, which belies the entertaining offenses they produced.

He is famous otherwise for his love of drag racing. We're talking funny cars, one step below the 8,000-horsepower top fuel giants. As an 8-year old at his father's side, he stopped a race after noticing a parachute wasn't hooked up right.

"If you get to the end of the track, pull the chute and it's not connected, you're done," Harsin said.

"It's an adrenaline rush," Harsin added. "It's something, now, when you get to the end of the track in six seconds. It's ... *wooosh*!"

Life intervened in 2006 when he got the promotion to Boise OC. His football career was improving and wife Kes was pregnant. No more drags.

Still, he makes the comparison to football: "Four-to-six seconds for a play, right?"

Ah, the adrenalin.

Like Malzahn, Harsin is an offensive guy. Like Gus, he is a quarterback specialist. That label for Malzahn had frayed at the edges in recent years. Rising Auburn junior Bo Nix hasn't progressed rapidly enough for some.

And the SEC has proven lately if you've got a quarterback, you've got a chance. There are six quarterbacks on the roster. After Malzahn was fired, Auburn was able to hold onto four-star dual-threat signee Dematrius Davis from Texas.

"We've got a lot of guys we have to develop," Harsin said diplomatically. "At the end of the day, we've got a lot of work to do. Bo's been a guy, if you watch him, he's a hard worker. He pushes himself. It's important to him."

The biggest difference between the Group of Five he came from and the Power Five he is revisiting is not the football, Harsin says.

"Josh Allen came out of Wyoming," he said, referring to the Buffalo Bills star quarterback. "There is good football all over the country. But your budgets, your resources (are different) ... As far as the coaches' ability? It's not different."

Harsin is well aware that in his new job, it just all means *more*.

Recruiting is an industry unto itself in the SEC. At Boise there were a handful of Division I prospects in the state of Idaho, so Harsin concentrated on California and Texas.

At Auburn, a recruiting class can be gathered in a five-hour car ride in any direction. Harsin and the four Boise State coaches he brought with him will have to learn the culture.

"It's more like Texas to me," Harsin said. "It's very competitive. A lot of the same guys are being recruited by everybody. How do you separate yourself? They've got to get to know who we are."

Now, about that team up north ...

"No doubt Coach Saban is at the very top of college football," Harsin said. "Really, the focus is on us. I've heard about these other coaches. I've heard about all these other teams.

"What about us?"

**Coach Harsin greets players after the A-Day spring game.**

Photo by USATNSYNDICATION

## HARSIN FILE

| Year | School | Record | Bowl |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2020 | Boise State | 5-2 | |
| 2019 | Boise State | 12-2 | Las Vegas |
| 2018 | Boise State | 10-3 | First Responder* |
| 2017 | Boise State | 11-3 | Las Vegas Bowl |
| 2016 | Boise State | 10-3 | Cactus Bowl |
| 2015 | Boise State | 9-4 | Poinsettia Bowl |
| 2014 | Boise State | 12-2 | Fiesta Bowl |
| 2013 | Arkansas State | 7-5 | |
| **TOTAL** | **8 years** | **76-24** | |

**Game canceled due to weather*

SCOPING THE NATION

# TRANSFERPALOOZA!

## BUY A GAME PROGRAM, THAT'S ALL

### 'FREE AGENCY' IS HERE TO STAY: PLAYERS NEED TO USE IT WISELY, COACHES NEED TO DEAL WITH IT

BY DENNIS DODD, ANTHONY GIMINO AND KYLE KENSING

Illustration by Tim Williams

College football free agency is here. And it's here to stay.

In April, the NCAA approved the long-anticipated one-time transfer legislation. It allows athletes in college football (and other sports) — one free transfer in their careers without sitting out a year in residence.

Depending on who you talk to, either the handcuffs are being removed, or the barn door is left wide open. Either way, coaches were resigned to its implementation long before the rule became official.

"I can say, 'The sky is falling,' or I can say, 'Tell me what the rule is, I'll adjust to it,'" Florida coach Dan Mullen said.

Years ago, when the one-time transfer concept started bubbling up, Nick Saban said, "Am I going to have to change the way I coach?"

You know what? Maybe. The best coaches will wind up being the best at managing the new environment. Bottom line: Alabama will still get the best players and UTEP won't.

So, what does it all actually mean? In the end, perhaps not much, other than a boon to sellers of game programs. We really will need a program to tell who the players are.

Athletes in football, hockey, baseball and men's and women's basketball will be able to transfer once in their careers. "Free agency" became a term co-opted by coaches who could feel their power eroding.

Quick answer: Deal with it.

As spring rolled into summer, coaches were already adjusting to the new transfer

climate. The notification deadline for football players will in future years be May 1 — essentially the end of spring practice. (For 2021, the rule was not implemented officially until late April, so the deadline was set for July 1, which left open a chaotic May-June transfer window.)

The implications go beyond the first glance. On its face, transfer freedom will be just the latest development that diminishes the NCAA's shrinking power. The problem stems from, as one administrator admitted, "we were bound to be sued" over not allowing players to move without penalty. And the NCAA and colleges recognize they would surely lose such a lawsuit.

Transfer freedom had to be allowed because the NCAA's antiquated rules continue to expose the colleges and association to legal liability.

For decades, athletes in the NCAA's 19 other sports have had such freedom. And the NCAA maintains that the student-athlete experience should mirror that of the normal student as closely as possible, but there wasn't anything normal about transfers in five sports being forced to sit out while athletes in 19 other sports did not.

And 37 percent of "normal students," statistics show, transferred at least once between 2008 and 2014. It just became impossible for the NCAA to continue to ignore these inequities, with athletes' rights a growing concern.

"This rule change is long overdue," athlete-rights attorney Tom Mars said. "It represents a giant step in treating college athletes equally and fairly. It appears the NCAA has finally recognized that college athletes deserve the same freedom of movement as head coaches who are paid millions of dollars a year and freely move from one job to another."

Away we go with unprecedented transfer freedom.

"People say it's like NFL free agency. You hear that all the time," one Power Five football assistant said, before adding dramatically, "NO, it's not. The NFL has a cap and they can pay money — teams can outbid somebody.

"We've just got to out-bullshit somebody."

It's a more layered discussion in college sports. The "year in residence" has been around since the mid-1960s. All along it had something to do with academic integrity and control. Nobody ever said it was fair.

We already have a template in college basketball, where 40 percent of players transfer by the end of their sophomore year.

"The bigger question is the future," said Todd Berry, executive director of the Ameri-

## TRANSFER PORTAL WINNERS AND LOSERS

**WINNER:** OKLAHOMA — Sooners coach Lincoln Riley took no pity on the woes at Tennessee, raiding the Vols for three of the top recruits that Jeremy Pruitt had worked so hard to bring to Knoxville before getting fired. In comes RB Eric Gray (793 yards, 4.9 per carry last season), LT Wayna Morris (former five-star prospect who was a Freshman All-American in 2019) and S Key Lawrence.

**LOSER:** TENNESSEE — See above. As of early May, nearly 30 Vols had entered the portal and had selected a new destination or were still deciding. This is one situation where new coach Josh Heupel was leaving the door wide open for a homecoming for many players.

**WINNER:** FLORIDA STATE — FSU landed Central Florida quarterback McKenzie Milton, coming off 2018's gruesome knee injury. There are multiple other reasons why the 'Noles are portal champs, but nothing else is needed beside this comeback story. If you're not rooting for Milton, you probably also don't like puppies.

**LOSER:** VIRGINIA TECH — The Hokies had to scratch starting quarterback Hendon Hooker (hey, a rare win for Tennessee in the portal!) and two starting offensive linemen — Bryan Hudson (Louisville) and Doug Nester (West Virginia) — from their projected 2021 depth chart

**WINNER:** MIAMI — The Hurricanes a year ago added QB D'Eriq King, DE Jaelan Phillips and DE Quincy Roche, among others. The 'Canes this year: WR Charleston Rambo (Oklahoma), CB Tyrique Stevenson (Georgia) and LB Deandre Johnson (Tennessee, again).

**LOSER:** NEBRASKA — Having WR Wan'Dale Robinson depart for his home state of Kentucky is a massive blow to Scott Frost's behind-schedule plan to energize the offense. And talented runner Luke McCaffrey still has a lot of runway left to take off as a college quarterback, but now he'll try to get off the ground from Louisville.

**Oklahoma Sooners running back Eric Gray (0)**
Photo by Kevin Jairaj-USA TODAY Sports

can Football Coaches Association.

Mullen said, "I have a feeling college football will be very different a couple of years from now. I can't tell you if it will be better or worse. I can't tell you how it will be different. I just think it will be different."

Here's a glimpse:

### MORE PLAYERS IN THE PORTAL THAN AVAILABLE SCHOLARSHIPS

In the spring, there were more than 1,500 players in the football portal alone. That number includes walk-ons hoping to snag a scholarship. (Good luck with that.)

Let's be generous and assume each of the 130 FBS programs have five extra scholarships to give. (They do not. Not even close. But we're trying to make a point.) That would be 650 scholarships. That also means a boatload of players won't have a new home.

But even for "pretty good" players who remember being flattered and wooed as high school recruits, their transfer options will usually be more complicated and more difficult to navigate.

Even if you perceive it as musical chairs — everybody just moves around and almost everybody lands in a chair — the numbers of available spots are not going to line up at all.

### NO GUARANTEES

Consider that about 30 percent of underclassmen who declare for the NFL Draft in any given year are not selected. That number doesn't fluctuate much one way or the other despite all the information out there — draft projections, professional representation, enough mock drafts to fill an airplane hangar, etc.

And those kinds of informational supports will not be available for run-of-the-mill sophomores who just want to find somewhere else to get more playing time.

For players, it could be "be careful what you wish for," but isn't it the American Dream to chase an elusive goal or hoped-for opportunity over the next fence? Why should it be a one-time decision for an 18-year-old, and not for a 21-year-old to make another choice?

### OUT IN THE WILDERNESS

Once you declare for the portal, a coach will often cancel your scholarship. After all, these spots are valuable and he has to fill them with additional incoming recruits or potential replacements from the transfer portal ... or he might even have hard-working walk-ons to reward.

So, unless you are Trevor Lawrence testing the waters, as soon as you declare you're free ... well, you're free, but out in the wilderness.

As a result, many players will find that the market for their services isn't what they thought it was, and they'll actually lose their opportunity to pay for college with an athletic scholarship. That can't be great, so, parents too will need to be increasingly aware of the possible pitfalls.

With this new freedom comes new responsibility to be able to sort through the options and choose which ones are real or imagined or short-term or long-term. Yes, some are going to be sold a bill of goods ("come here and you'll start and get to the NFL"), but that's always been part of the deal.

Life isn't fair, and this won't be, either. But more freedom means fewer restrictions. The portal imbalance isn't going to be magically fixed anytime soon. Yet, that's not a reason to deny players their transfer freedom.

### TAMPERING WILL RUN RAMPANT

News flash, tampering is rampant now. One-time transfer rules or not, athletes are going to be lured to transfer by outside sources — friends of friends, personal trainers, high school coaches, parents, potential new teammates ... general "go betweens."

With the doors blown open, tampering is going to be more prevalent than ever.

"Honestly when the guys reach the transfer portal, it's almost too late (to go after them)," SMU coach Sonny Dykes said. "You know about them because all these kids talk to each other. They all go through the recruiting process together."

Central Michigan coach Jim McElwain said, "Let's call it what it is. Somebody makes a phone call and says, 'We got a scholarship at our school. Would the kid be interested?' There's a lot of that going on."

### POST-SPRING PRACTICE MOVEMENT

Something will have to be done about teams especially hard hit by transfers, particularly after spring practice. "That's the one that is catastrophic," veteran coordinator Kevin Steele said.

Consider a quarterback who isn't starting: If he moves in December or January, he and both schools involved can become adjusted to the new situation and use spring football to sort out the new reality.

But those who lose a position battle at the end of spring practice and transfer schools afterward can really disrupt both schools, and unwittingly create no-win situations for themselves and other players.

Now multiply that over several positions over several teams.

### THE 25 ANNUAL 'INITIAL SCHOLARSHIP' LIMIT

Mullen points out that the post-spring practice problem is really an ongoing problem, since schools may bring in only 25 new scholarship players a year to sign high school players, junior college players, and award scholarships to deserving walk-ons ... and, oh yeah, to offer to players from the transfer portal.

"People don't grasp that part of it," Mullen said. "Each year, you're allowed 25 scholarships. ... Let's say we've signed 23. We finish spring ball and six kids enter the portal. I can only sign two."

That's a net loss of four players, but the

## NATIONAL LEADERS

Individual leaders in some key career statistical categories heading into 2021:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Rushing: | Joshua Mack | Liberty | 3,618 yards |
| Passing: | Charlie Brewer | Utah | 9,700 yards |
| Passing efficiency: | Layne Hatcher | Arkansas State | 172.25 |
| Receptions: | Justin Hall | Ball State | 257 |
| Receiving yards: | Justin Hall | Ball State | 2,772 |
| All-purpose yards: | Calvin Turner Jr. | Hawaii | 4,359 yards |
| Tackles: | Colin Schooler | Texas Tech | 375 |
| Sacks: | Tomon Fox | North Carolina | 21.5 |
| Forced fumbles: | Jake Hansen | Illinois | 10 |
| Interceptions: | Meiko Dotson | Florida State | 9 |
| Passes defended: | T.J. Carter | TCU | 40 |

85-scholarship limit doesn't change. There's a growing idea that the limit of 25 signees might be dropped as long as programs adhere to the 85-man scholarship maximum. This, "lose one-take one" concept sounds good, but it would immediately open a can of serious manipulation and churning of rosters as if players were one-season interchangeable parts. You think "running players off" is a problem now? Yikes.

So, we don't expect the 25 annual limit to be amended anytime soon.

"Everyone knows there was never any legitimate rationale for the rule other than a concern about roster management," Mars said. "As much as some head coaches may complain about that, they'll adjust and figure it out. After all, they wouldn't be getting paid millions of dollars a year if these jobs were easy."

### MASS MOVEMENT EVENTS

What will happen to programs when coaches are fired, or leave for another job? That's already happening, too. Mass exodus is not uncommon, but when all of the players who feel jilted know they have another option now?

Rebuilding "from the ground up" is taking on new meaning, as coaches taking over many programs are finding themselves with 60 or 70 scholarship players on hand and needing three or four years just to get the numbers back up.

### ROSTER MANAGEMENT WILL BE KEY

Much like NFL teams with "capologists" in building their rosters and continually evaluating options, college programs will have to assign an administrative assistant the job of keeping track on who is available (or might become available), and how to recruit them. This is above and beyond a normal "recruiting coordinator."

### ONE-TIME COULD EVENTUALLY MEAN A LOT OF TIMES

One-time transfer legislation is meant to be just that — one move without sitting out. But if recent events and the courts have taught us anything, all you need is a capable lawyer and a waiver request to make this transfer thing a revolving door. There will inevitably be requests for a second transfer within a career by players who are unhappy with playing time, wish to be closer to home, etc. You know the reasons.

"The reality is, if you're making the right accusations, you're getting a waiver regardless," one administrator said.

In other words, nobody really knows how any of this is all going to shake out.

**Nick Saban celebrates after defeating the Ohio State Buckeyes in the 2021 College Football Playoff**

Photo by Mark J. Rebilas-USA TODAY Sports

## THE YEAR AFTER ★

Nick Saban says motivating a team is harder after winning a national title. It's human nature.

"I challenged the players on the team," Saban said. "'Are you going to be individually accountable for all the things you need to do to be able to do your job, or are you going to have to have someone else show you the way?'"

This from a guy who is trying for the SEVENTH time to keep his next team hungry following a national championship season, including six at Alabama. The year after the big, fat rings arrive, his next teams have won an incredible 88 percent of their games.

But only one team – his 2012 Crimson Tide — has been able to repeat as national champion.

So, challenge them he does, saying, "I think that's important for young players."

Of course, they're all young. But this time around, Alabama's roster is exceptionally youthful. There are new coaches, too. With holes to fill on offense and defense and with a new coaching staff, there will be issues for sure.

And Saban will use all of it as motivation. Maybe it will work this time.

Here is what happened to Saban's previous national champions in the following season:

| Year | Champ | The Year After |
|---|---|---|
| 2004 | LSU | 9-3, lost Capital One Bowl to Iowa |
| 2010 | Alabama | 10-3, won Capital One Bowl vs. Michigan State |
| 2012 | Alabama | 12-1, won BCS title game over Notre Dame |
| 2013 | Alabama | 11-2, lost Sugar Bowl to Oklahoma |
| 2016 | Alabama | 14-1, lost CFP title game to Clemson |
| 2018 | Alabama | 14-1, lost CFP title game to Clemson |
| 2021 | Alabama | ???? |

# SCOPING THE NATION

# COACHING CHANGES

COVID-19 was supposed to provide cover for coaches on the hot seat, providing sort of a mulligan year.

Not exactly.

While the pandemic lessened the volume of departures — only 17 this offseason — it didn't keep some big-time programs from swallowing some big-time cash. Texas, South Carolina and Auburn paid a combined $42 million to buy out departed coaches.

The 17 changes now make it 87 schools that have switched coaches at least once in the last four seasons (67 percent).

Here's how we grade the hires as we enter the 2021 college football season.

## UCF

**In:** Gus Malzahn | **Out:** Josh Heupel

**Grade:** 9.5

Gus is not only the best addition of the hiring cycle, he's basically the best Group of 5 hire since we started calling it the Group of 5 about 10 years ago. And it's not even close. That's because championship-pedigree Power 5 coaches with a .670 winning percentage who have beaten Nick Saban three times usually don't fall out of the sky ... for any team. Gus seems renewed as a coach, recruiter, play-caller and person.

## TEXAS

**In:** Steve Sarkisian | **Out:** Tom Herman

**Grade:** 9

In one sense, Sark seems a lot like Tom Herman four years ago — the hottest name left on the board. Championship pedigree. Offensive guy. Texas boosters long ago took their shot at Saban (and missed). In the offseason, they took a run at Urban Meyer (and missed). Sarkisian is the next best thing — college football's best play-caller fresh off a national championship.

## AUBURN

**In:** Bryan Harsin | **Out:** Gus Malzahn

**Grade:** 8.5

It's OK to refer to Harsin as Auburn's fourth (or fifth) choice. The school went through Auburn's version of, *ahem*, "The Process," but wound up with probably the best candidate out there. Harsin arrives unfamiliar with SEC culture, but plenty of experience in a winning culture.

## KANSAS

**In:** Lance Leipold | **Out:** Les Miles

**Grade:** 8.5

The Buffalo coach finished 24-10 in his last three seasons, including two division titles and two MAC Coach of the Year honors. If any of that — plus six D-III titles — rubs off on the low-flying Jayhawks, this hire will be a raging success.

## ILLINOIS

**In:** Bret Bielema | **Out:** Lovie Smith

**Grade:** 8

The Lovie Smith Experiment failed. AD Josh Whitman did the right thing in transitioning to an experienced, willing, winning former Big Ten college head coach. Illinois should never be this bad. It will immediately be more physical under Bielema, who took Wisconsin to three straight Rose Bowls and should have never left for the big bucks in Arkansas (which he then has had to fight for in court). In an age when the spread rules, maybe Bielema's bully ball will be the change-up that elevates the Illini.

**UCF Knights head coach Gus Malzahn (right)**

Photo by Mike Watters-USA TODAY Sports

## BOISE STATE

**In:** Andy Avalos | **Out:** Bryan Harsin

**Grade:** 8

A former Broncos linebacker, Avalos helped lead Oregon to consecutive Pac-12 titles as defensive coordinator. His 2019 unit was second in the conference. Boise has hired a former Broncos player or assistant coach to be head coach going back to 1998. The only drawback? Avalos has never been a head coach.

## UTAH STATE

**In:** Blake Anderson | **Out:** Gary Anderson

**Grade:** 8

Utah State needed stability when Gary Anderson left in midstream. And Blake Anderson seems to provide that. When he took over at Arkansas State seven years ago, ASU was a true "Steppingstone U," as Hugh Freeze, Gus Malzahn and Bryan Harsin each spent a year there and parlayed it into something bigger. Blake Anderson stayed and led the Red Wolves to six consecutive winning seasons and bowl games before stumbling last year.

## ARKANSAS STATE

**In:** Butch Jones | **Out:** Blake Anderson

**Grade:** 8

What Jones accomplished at Tennessee looks better every day. Arkansas State usually doesn't whiff on head coaching hires, and Jones has completely made over his reputation after three years in Saban's career rehab clinic.

## VANDERBILT

**In:** Clark Lea | **Out:** Derek Mason

**Grade:** 7.5

Vanderbilt is not exactly the best place to start your Power 5 coaching career, but Lea is a native son, having played fullback

for Bobby Johnson back in the day. It's a heavy, heavy lift, but Lea — having come over as Notre Dame's defensive coordinator — seems up to it.

## MARSHALL

**In:** Charles Huff | **Out:** Doc Holliday

**Grade:** 7.5

Former Alabama running backs coach Charles Huff is considered one of the best recruiters in college football and was a savant with running backs at Alabama, but hopefully he understands that even if he averages eight wins over 11 seasons and gets the Thundering Herd to eight bowl games, if he starts 7-0 and has the team ranked in a season but stumbles to a 7-3 finish, he'll still probably be let go if the governor of West Virginia doesn't like him. Just like Holliday was.

## SOUTH ALABAMA

**In:** Kane Wommack | **Out:** Steve Campbell

**Grade:** 7.5

Wommack was South Alabama's defensive coordinator in 2016-17. The Broyles Award finalist (best assistant coach) was a big part of an Indiana turnaround the past two seasons. In 2020, his unit led the Big Ten in interceptions (17), takeaways (20) and opponent red zone conversions (64 percent). The son of a coach (Dave Wommack, former DC at Arkansas, Ole Miss), this is a good starter job.

## ARIZONA

**In:** Jedd Fisch | **Out:** Kevin Sumlin

**Grade:** 7

Fisch has done everything right in welcoming back former players and opening practices. He hired two of the program's College Football Hall of Famers — Ricky Hunley and Chuck Cecil — as defensive assistants and brought in another, Tedy Bruschi, as a consultant. Then Fisch paired Bruschi with Rob Gronkowski as guest coaches at the spring game. Fisch's off-season grade is a 10, but the well-traveled assistant has a lot to prove as a first-time head coach when toe meets leather.

## SOUTHERN MISS

**In:** Will Hall | **Out:** Jay Hopson

**Grade:** 7

Southern Miss needed an offensive revival like the one Willie Fritz has going at Tulane. So, it got the next best thing, Fritz's offensive coordinator at Tulane. Under Hall, the Green Wave averaged more than 34 points per game in 2020, its highest output in more than a decade.

## TENNESSEE

**In:** Josh Heupel | **Out:** Jeremy Pruitt

**Grade:** 6.5

Other more accomplished candidates may have been scared away by the NCAA investigation. Heupel, though, is one heck of a "fall back." He's the offensive-friendly guy his once-and-present boss AD Danny White wanted. A turnaround will take a while considering the NCAA thing and the Vols' place in the SEC universe.

## LOUISIANA-MONROE

**In:** Terry Bowden | **Out:** Matt Viator

**Grade:** 6.5

At 64, Bowden wanted one last swing at the coaching pinata. Bobby's son knows about turnarounds. Terry went undefeated at Auburn (plus three nine-win seasons). He then took North Alabama to three Division II playoffs. Bowden also took Akron to its first-ever bowl game (and bowl win). Oh, and he spent the last two seasons as a Clemson analyst.

## BUFFALO

**In:** Maurice Linguist | **Out:** Lance Leipold

**Grade:** 6.5

Buffalo went 24-10 in the past three seasons, but Leipold was plucked away by Kansas in late April. The Bulls snagged up-and-coming 37-year-old Maurice Linguist, Michigan's DBs coach/co-defensive coordinator for about five months.

## SOUTH CAROLINA

**In:** Shane Beamer | **Out:** Will Muschamp

**Grade:** 6

Frank Beamer's son is one of the most talented and likeable guys on his way up the ladder. But Shane has never even been a coordinator. He bonded with the community but there were transfer defections galore upon his hiring. For a program that is losing traction in the SEC — 6-16 in the last two seasons — South Carolina can't afford any more slippage.

# SEVEN HOT-SEAT COACHES

**1. JIM HARBAUGH, MICHIGAN** — In six years (and signed through 2025), he hasn't been able to solve the simple math of today's game: If you've got a quarterback, you've got a chance.

**2. CLAY HELTON, USC** — New year, same discussion about Helton's future. Finishing in the AP Top 25 in just three of his six years is only half as good as USC should be. Considering that Helton has run out of coordinators/assistants to fire, it's now his neck that is way out there.

**3. JEFF BROHM, PURDUE** — Tumbled to an 8-16 record since a 2018 upset of Ohio State. And now they always lose to Indiana? Ouch.

**4. DINO BABERS, SYRACUSE** — Had the brilliant 10-win season in 2018, but there hasn't been cause to post many joyous locker room videos lately, with the Cuse going just 6-17 in the past two seasons, including 1-10 in 2020.

**5. DANA HOLGORSEN, HOUSTON** — Couldn't hang on to QB D'Eriq King and, after two seasons on the job, is clawing for relevancy in the AAC.

**6. JUSTIN FUENTE, VIRGINIA TECH** — His job status was so tenuous after last season that Tech's athletic director felt the need to hold a press conference announcing that he wasn't firing Fuente, who is 38-26 in his five seasons, but just 19-18 the last three years. The buyout was too big after last season's 5-6 finish.

**7. SCOTT FROST, NEBRASKA** — It was the lock of all locks that his homecoming would be a return to Nebraska greatness — or at least to Bo Pelini-level of very good-ness. Instead, it's basically been Mike Riley's 2017 season on a loop: 12-20 in three seasons.

**LEFT: Michigan Head Coach, Jim Harbaugh**
Photo by Junfu Han - USATNSYNDICATION

SCOPING THE NATION

# THE ONLY WOMAN IN THE ROOM IS THE QB COACH

**Brown University QB coach Heather Marini**
Photo by Jessica Koach - USATNSYNDICATION

The milestones football has reached in 2021 signal the start of what Heather Marini calls "an avalanche."

Come September, when Brown opens its 132nd season against in-state rival Rhode Island, Marini makes her in-game debut as the first woman to coach a Division-I position group.

"Coaches are realizing that excluding 50 percent of the population when they're hiring is not the best thing for their teams," the Bears quarterbacks coach Marini said of the college programs and professional organizations hiring women to prominent roles. "Qualified women — and it's not just women, but qualified women — who come in these positions are going to get further opportunities."

Thus begins the first trickle of the "avalanche," which is snowballing fast in 2021.

Marini's first game as Brown's quarterbacks coach comes the same calendar year in which Tampa Bay Buccaneers assistant defensive line coach Lori Locust and assistant strength and conditioning coach Maral Javadifar became the first women on staff with a Super Bowl team.

Although Marini said, "it won't be long before" milestones like hers and those of Locust and Javadifar are "no longer news."

"It's gravity to everybody else," said Marini, already an experienced trailblazer as the first woman to be head coach of a men's team in Australia. "I'm used to being the only woman in the room. ... Whether I was the first, the 21st or the 101st, I was still here to do my job: Help the players be the best they can be."

Brown head coach James Perry first connected with Marini through the NFL's Women's Careers in Football Forum. Working then as head coach at Bryant University, Perry's staffs included Phoebe Schecter, who coached with the Buffalo Bills; and Sue Lizotte, the current running backs coach at Div. III University of New England.

Perry cited that desire of Marini's to "help the players be the best" shining through in her offensive quality control role.

"Like a lot of those positions, it's very data-driven," Perry said. "Heather was very detail-oriented, always looking for additional projects to do, always looking to talk football. If she was doing a self-scout project for me, it was always very well done. I knew pretty early on in her role as quality control, and if I had a position that made sense, I'd promote her."

Just as quickly, Perry is seeing validation of her promotion. Marini's quarterback room includes E.J. Perry, a transfer from Boston College and one of the top statistical playmakers in the FCS in 2019.

Perry passed for almost 3,000 yards, accounted for 22 touchdowns in the air and another eight on the ground, and rushed for more than 700 yards. He has the tools, and guidance, to contend for the Walter Payton Award, given to the top offensive player in the subdivision.

"He was really sharp this spring, and he responds well to her type of coaching," James Perry said of the quarterback's relationship with Marini. "It's amazing how well he responds to Heather, and the progress this spring was clear. That was fun for me to see."

Marini's efforts to grow as a coach included taking a trip to Cal at the invitation of former Golden Bears and current Oregon defensive coordinator Tim DeRuyter.

Working with peers like Marques Tuiasosopo (now the offensive coordinator at Rice) and Beau Baldwin (head coach at Cal Poly) reflected the general attitudes Marini said she has encountered breaking ground in the male-dominated arena.

"Overwhelmingly, it's been positive," she said. "In this profession, the players figure you out quickly. If you have something to offer them, they're willing to listen and I think that just shows the competitors we have within our sport."

That spirit of competition will only lead to more opportunities for women in the sport, and a coach like Marini will indeed no longer command headlines for anything beyond her abilities.

"I'm visible as I can be because I want little boys and little girls to see what's possible for them and their sons and daughters in the future," she said. "Women who are early leaders in this field, we carry that responsibility so that in the future, no one will [have to]."

*— Kyle Kensing*

# HEISMAN WATCH

Illustration by Tim Williams

Now that they got that out of the way for the next 30 years — giving a wide receiver the Heisman Trophy was about as politically correct as you can get in this game — we can get back to normal and go ahead and carve the word "quarterback" on the trophy under the nameplate again for 2021.

For more than two decades, it has been the award for quarterbacks who play on highly rated teams, with a dash of Alabama running backs (and one wide receiver) mixed in.

It's pretty wide open this year, but there are plenty of quarterbacks ready to step to the front of the class:

**1. SPENCER RATTLER, QB, OKLAHOMA** — Won a Big 12 title, conquered Texas, was peachy in the Peach ... and is only going to get better in the Sooners' Heisman-friendly offense.

**2. SAM HOWELL, QB, NORTH CAROLINA** — Production is not a question — 7,227 yards and 68 touchdowns in 25 games — but can he climb to an ACC Coastal title and a league championship?

**3. D.J. UIAGALELEI, QB, CLEMSON** — Deshaun Watson and Trevor Lawrence were Heisman finalists for the Tigers, and now it will be talented, inexperienced Uiagalelei who looks to take those final steps from the front-row seats to the stage to collect that stiff-armed trophy.

**4. BRYCE YOUNG, QB, ALABAMA** — New QB for No. 1 team. Giddy-up.

**5. JT DANIELS, QB, GEORGIA** — Stetson Bennett, we hardly know ye. Daniels, a USC transfer, finally got healthy after his 2019 ACL tear and averaged 308 yards with 10 touchdowns in the Dawgs' final four games.

**6. D'ERIQ KING, QB, MIAMI** — He's a ton of fun as a passer/runner/scrambler. College football is better in 2021 because he's back for a sixth season.

**7. C.J. STROUD, QB, OHIO STATE** — He has yet to throw a pass in college, but this California kid is the Buckeyes' presumptive starter, taking over for Justin Fields. We don't make the rules; we just follow the formula: Starting QB + Ohio State = Heisman candidate.

**8. BROCK PURDY, QB, IOWA STATE** — It's not crazy talk that the Cyclones could spin Oklahoma out of the Big 12 top spot. And who would get the credit for that? This Purdy guy. He has thrown for more yards at his current school (8,982) than any 2021 QB.

**9. KEDON SLOVIS, QB, USC** — Nobody fessed up to Slovis having arm issues last season, although it wasn't hard to spot several butterflies floating out of his right hand. Whatever was going on, the dude still found a way to pile comeback victory upon comeback victory, and we still believe in his accuracy — and the potential for the Trojans to be good.

**10. BRIAN ROBINSON, RB, ALABAMA** — Two Alabama running backs and a Tide receiver have won the Heisman in the past 12 years. So, you can't rule this out, even if he's never been the featured Bama back. Although if you wanted to put some long-shot coin on a running back named Robinson, we might also suggest Bijan, the sophomore for Texas.

Illustration by Tim Williams

# ★ UNDERDOGS VS. FAVORITES ★

Who doesn't love an underdog? If you don't, you should — at least half the time, right?

Over the last five years, college football underdogs are over .500 against the spread — albeit not by much — but if you're a strict "favorites" bettor, you might think about leaning on the dog more often.

According to odds published in *USA Today* for more than 3,500 college football games between FBS teams since the 2016 season, underdogs have a .511 winning percentage. That might not sound like much, but that's 72 games over .500.

Not surprisingly, in that time, Alabama has been the favorite favorite. The Crimson Tide has been favored in every single game they have played, including eight playoff games. They are 60 games over .500 straight up, but a less-overwhelming 38-27-1 (.583) against the spread during that time. Still, that's good enough to pad your bank account.

Even a little better, Clemson, the other two-time national champ since 2016, is 39-25-2 ATS (.606).

Even with its appearance in the national championship game last season, Ohio State didn't make up any ground on the ATS field. The Buckeyes are merely one game over .500 since 2016 and were a middling 4-4 last season after being thrashed in the title game by Alabama.

Flip that over and a perennial underdog like Kansas (a dismal 9-48 overall), is … well, still Kansas. The Jayhawks are a semi-respectable 21-30-2 ATS as an underdog, but that's doesn't mean they're worth playing on a given Saturday.

There are nine teams in FBS over .600 ATS over the past five years. Do you want to keep riding them?

**1. LSU** — Even better than Alabama or Clemson, the Tigers have the top ATS record at 38-20-1 (.653), thanks in large part to that stunning 2019 national championship season (11-2-1 ATS vs. major college foes).

**2T. WYOMING AND EASTERN MICHIGAN** — Right behind the Tigers are a pair of unlikely teams that aren't on the radar of casual college football betting fans (well, at least until now), both .648 ATS.

**4. BUFFALO** — The Bulls come in with a nice 34-19-1 mark (.639), but considering that coach Lance Leipold has taken his talents to – yes, Kansas, you'll see where we're going with this. Leipold knows how to win and/or keep games close as an underdog … … so is the smart money now will be on Kansas vs. The Spread in 2021?

**5-10.** Utah (63.6 percent), UAB (63.3), Iowa State (62.7) and Liberty (61.7, with only three years of data) round out the top ATS teams before you get to Clemson at No. 9 and Temple (59.8) at No. 10.

Now that we've helped you get rich, please send 10 percent of all 2021 winnings to: "Office coffee fund, *Lindy's* Sports Annuals."

# Top 10 Quarterback Transfers

**1. MCKENZIE MILTON, UCF TO FLORIDA STATE** — If he pulls off this comeback, he wins all of college football's warm fuzzies.

**2. JACK COAN, WISCONSIN TO NOTRE DAME** — Started 18 games for the Badgers before missing last season due to injury while losing his job to Graham Mertz. All he has to do is replace the moxie (and production) of three-year starter Ian Book.

**3. CHARLIE BREWER, UTAH** — Four-year starter at Baylor will help Utah make push for Pac-12 title, arriving with 9,700 passing yards and 1,039 more on the ground.

**4. ALAN BOWMAN, MICHIGAN** — Oft-injured at Texas Tech, but he does have a 605-yard passing game and brings 5,260 career passing yards to the Wolverines' quarterback room when he crashes the party in the summer. The pro-styler has three years of eligibility left, too.

**5. TYLER SHOUGH, TEXAS TECH** — He quarterbacked Oregon to the Pac-12 Championship Game, but when Anthony Brown got increasing reps in the title game and the bowl game, Shough bailed Eugene for Lubbock. That wouldn't be everybody's career path … but OK, then.

**6. JACK ABRAHAM, MISSISSIPPI STATE** — The Bulldogs' offense was mostly un-Mike Leach-like in Mike Leach's first season in Starkville, so it's not like Abraham has to replace or beat out any Air Raid legends. If he's the guy he was at Southern Miss — 7,067 career passing yards — he'll be just fine, assuming The Pirate also dedicated some time to get his offensive line shipshape.

**7A. HENDON HOOKER, TENNESSEE** — The Virginia Tech transfer gets to play in new coach Josh Heupel's offensive sandbox. The Vols might not be good, but maybe somewhat entertaining?

**7B. JOE MILTON, TENNESSEE** — The Michigan transfer gets to play in new coach Josh Heupel's offensive sandbox. The Vols might not be good, but maybe somewhat entertaining?

**8. GRANT GUNNELL, MEMPHIS** — Holding multiple Texas high school passing records, Gunnell was supposed to be the centerpiece of Kevin Sumlin's rebuild at Arizona. But when Sumlin failed to make it past his third season in Tucson, Gunnell packed up his seven career starts and headed east.

**9. ANTHONY RUSSO, MICHIGAN STATE** — Three-year starter at Temple (6,292 passing yards, 44 TDs, 32 INTs) on the comeback trail after being limited to three games last season due to injury and COVID protocols.

**10. CHASE BRICE, APPALACHIAN STATE** — The Mountaineers need a quarterback and Brice — a former backup to Clemson's Trevor Lawrence and 2020 starter at Duke — is the guy for a team that went 9-3 last season and is looking for the Sun Belt title.

**Florida State Seminoles quarterback McKenzie Milton (10)**
Photo by Alicia Devine/Tallahassee Democrat - USATNSYNDICATION

**Clemson running back Will Shipley**
Photo by Ken Ruinard/Staff - USATNSYNDICATION

# FIVE TRUE FRESHMEN TO WATCH

**1. ALABAMA WIDE RECEIVERS** — We'll start by singling out Agiye Hall because we urge you to find video of his catch on a deep ball in the spring game and the highlight of him showing off his concentration and body control on a sideline snag. And then realize that he's not even the highest-rated Tide freshman wideout. That would be five-star Ja'Corey Brooks. Oh, yeah, two more four-stars are also headed to the new Wide Receiver U, so let's bundle this whole group together and make them No. 1 to watch … unless it ends up being the Tide's group of new offensive linemen.

**2. WILL SHIPLEY, RB, CLEMSON** — The next Travis Etienne? Says coach Dabo Swinney of the nation's top all-purpose back: "He can fly."

**3. KOREY FOREMAN, DE, USC** — THIS is what USC used to do all the time. When the nation's No. 1 overall recruit grows up in Southern California (Corona), you sign him up.

**4. TREVEYON HENDERSON, RB, OHIO STATE** — We like returning RB Master Teague just fine in a reliable, get-me-some-yards kind of way. Look for Henderson's flash to play an increasing role during the season.

**5. NYLAND GREEN, CB, GEORGIA** — The Bulldogs need corners. Green enrolled early and looked ready to help, perhaps start.

# SCOPING THE NATION

## Top Baker's Dozen Conference Games

**1. OKLAHOMA VS. TEXAS (DALLAS), OCT. 9** — Maybe we won't get four OTs like we did last season, but this Red River Showdown keeps dialing up the drama like no other rivalry. Seven of the past eight meetings have been decided by a touchdown or less.

**2. ALABAMA AT TEXAS A&M, OCT. 9** — Is this Alabama's toughest conference game? Could be, although LSU, Florida and Auburn would like a word.

**3. ALABAMA AT FLORIDA, SEPT. 18** — The Gators tested Alabama like no other last season as the teams put up 98 points in the 2020 SEC title game. Can Florida reload as fast as the Tide?

**4. IOWA STATE AT OKLAHOMA, NOV. 20** — Two best teams in the Big 12 could meet again two weeks later in conference title game. That's what happened last season, when Sooners avenged a regular-season loss.

**5. GEORGIA VS. FLORIDA (JACKSONVILLE), OCT. 30** — Stat of the day: The Dawgs have had a double-digit first-quarter lead in each of the past four meetings, winning three, but not last year when the Gators took on a 14-0 deficit before boat-racing Georgia, 44-28.

**6. OHIO STATE AT MICHIGAN, NOV. 27** — After the Wolverines figured out last season how to not get stuck with an L for the only time in a decade, this still feels bigger than it's been.

**7. ALABAMA AT AUBURN, NOV. 27** — Whatcha got, Bryan Harsin?

**8. OREGON AT WASHINGTON, NOV. 6** — Bitter rivals always throwing knives and, if we're right, will be battling for the Pac-12 North title.

**9. MIAMI AT NORTH CAROLINA, OCT. 16** — The Coastal race likely comes down to this. Winner gets a date with Clemson several weeks later.

**10. OHIO STATE AT INDIANA, OCT. 23** — Hoosiers still trying to kick in the door against the Buckeyes after last year's rally fell short and IU's losing streak in the series reached 25 games.

**11. TEXAS A&M AT LSU, NOV. 27** — On the off chance that Alabama stumbles, this could decide the SEC West and much more.

**12. USC AT ARIZONA STATE, NO. 6** — The Trojans are in position to re-establish themselves in the Pac-12 South and beyond, but the Sun Devils are well-stocked and were far the better last year before bumbling away a sure victory.

**13. LSU AT ALABAMA, NOV. 6** — This game is late enough in the season that we'll know if LSU is closer to the roaring 2019 Tigers or the domesticated 2020 version.

## Top Dozen Non-Conference Games

**1. CLEMSON VS. GEORGIA (CHARLOTTE, N.C.), SEPT 4** — One of the early playoff contenders is going to take an L. Whoever wins should be No. 1 in the polls two days later, assuming the Tigers don't start there.

**2. ALABAMA VS. MIAMI (ATLANTA), SEPT. 4** — The Tide routinely devours big-time opponents on opening weekend, and this one will have Tide fans extra tingly. The last time these teams met, it was Jan. 1, 1993, in a national championship showdown in the Sugar Bowl. No. 1 Miami was riding a 29-game winning streak when Gene Stallings's second-ranked Tide shocked the hell out of 'em. If you have a half hour to spare, just ask any Alabama fan about "The Strip." (You can also look up the 16-second highlight on YouTube.)

**3. OREGON AT OHIO STATE, SEPT. 11** — Still crying over not getting to see this matchup in Autzen Stadium last season. This

**Oklahoma vs. Texas during the Red River Showdown at the Cotton Bowl in 2020.**
Photo by Andrew Dieb-USA TODAY Sports

is one of a handful of games that Pac-12 hopes are pinned on as their Sweet 16-like attention grabbers for football (Washington-Michigan, UCLA-LSU, Texas A&M-Colorado, USC-Notre Dame are others).

**4. CINCINNATI AT NOTRE DAME, OCT. 2** — Every Power 5 conference playoff contender will be rooting for Notre Dame (and every Group of 5 team will be rooting for Cincinnati), because if the Bearcats win and otherwise run the table — which is doable — they will have that Final Four resume that could finally knock a big boy out of a semifinal. A Cincinnati victory could hasten the move to increase the playoff to eight or 16 teams in future years.

**5. NEBRASKA AT OKLAHOMA, SEPT. 18** — The Game That Would Not Be Cancelled. Or perhaps you prefer, The 50th Anniversary of the Game of the Century.

**6. IOWA AT IOWA STATE, SEPT. 11** — Does the Cy-Hawk Series get better than this? Well, no. No it does not.

**7. USC AT NOTRE DAME, OCT. 23 — AND NORTH CAROLINA, OCT. 30** — Talented teams with much to prove from opposite coasts take turns invading South Bend.

**8. AUBURN AT PENN STATE, SEPT. 18** — Auburn has not played a Big Ten team in the regular season since tying Wisconsin, 7-7, at Camp Randall Stadium in 1931. We know nobody plays football outside of the SEC (heh-heh), but that was 90 years ago!

**9. NOTRE DAME VS. WISCONSIN (CHICAGO), SEPT. 25** — Fighting Irish. Badgers. Soldier Field. It's a college football Midwest special.

**10. LOUISIANA AT TEXAS, SEPT. 4** — The talented Ragin' Cajuns upset Iowa State last season and go after more Big 12 red meat in Steve Sarkisian's debut with the 'Horns.

**11. LIBERTY AT OLE MISS, NOV. 6** — Hugh Freeze goes back to his old stomping grounds to play the Rebels, now coached by Lane Kiffin, that might end up being the most entertaining game of the season, if you like offense. You do like offense, right?

**12. OKLAHOMA STATE AT BOISE STATE, SEPT. 18** — It's a rare trip to the Smurf Turf by a Power 5 team — and a Top 25 one at that. Good for you, Cowboys. Unless you lose. Then, not so much.

## BOWLS AND PROJECTIONS

Here's the when, where, and our projected who for the big-boy bowls this season:

### COTTON BOWL
Friday, Dec. 31
Arlington, Texas • AT&T Stadium
National semifinal
**Lindy's pick:** Alabama vs. Georgia

### ORANGE BOWL
Friday, Dec. 31
Miami Gardens, Fla. • Hard Rock Stadium
National semifinal
**Lindy's pick:** Clemson vs. Oklahoma

### PEACH BOWL
Thursday, Dec. 30
Atlanta • Mercedes-Benz Stadium
At-large vs. At-large
**Lindy's pick:** Florida vs. Notre Dame

### ROSE BOWL
Saturday, Jan. 1
Pasadena, Calif. • Rose Bowl
Pac-12 vs. Big Ten
**Lindy's pick:** Oregon vs. Ohio State

### FIESTA BOWL
Saturday, Jan. 1
Glendale, Ariz. • State Farm Stadium
At-large vs. At-large
**Lindy's pick:** Cincinnati vs. North Carolina

### SUGAR BOWL
Saturday, Jan. 1
New Orleans • Mercedes-Benz Superdome
Big 12 vs. SEC
**Lindy's pick:** Iowa State vs. Texas A&M

### CFP CHAMPIONSHIP GAME
Monday, Jan. 10
Indianapolis • Lucas Oil Stadium
**Lindy's pick:** Alabama vs. Clemson

*(**Note:** At-large means any team in the country — so probably a Power 5 conference team, although the top-ranked team from the Group of 5 smaller conferences also gets a berth.)*

## A CHANGE IN OVERTIME

The NCAA has tweaked its overtime rules again in an attempt to rob us of the incredible drama of weary teams staggering back and forth for four, five, six, seven (!) extra periods … uh, we mean in an attempt to address player safety.

Here's the new deal: Teams must run a two-point play beginning with the SECOND overtime. This was previously required with the third overtime.

But there is one more twist. If the game does reach a third overtime, it's all alternating two-point plays. That's it. Neither team has to start a drive on the opponent's 25-yard line.

Which got us thinking …

## TIME TO MOVE BACK THE PAT

Extra-point kicks in college are b-o-r-i-n-g.

The past three years: Only three percent of the PATs have been missed in the past three years.

Consider that last season, Alabama's Will Reichard made every single one of his 84 extra points — and, for good measure, each of his 14 field-goal attempts. Further consider that Ohio State's Blake Haubeil graduated after making 146 PATs in a row over three seasons.

At the same time, the percentage of successful 2-point tries over the past three season is about 43 percent. Way more interesting than 97 percent, right?

Next step: Let's change the extra-point rule. Follow what the NFL does and make college kids boot the PAT from 33 yards, instead of a 20-yarder. That would make us watch it, and perhaps give us a few more exciting 2-point conversions.

# SCOPING THE NATION

# SNEAK PEAK

It's never too early to look ahead to the NFL Draft. The folks at NFL Draft Bible do this year-round, and here are their consensus early-May version of the top eligible 2022 draft prospects by positions (and it's always interesting how pro projections can differ from college production):

Nevada Wolf Pack quarterback Carson Strong (12)
Photo by Brian Losness-USA TODAY Sports

## QUARTERBACKS

1. Carson Strong, Nevada
2. JT Daniels, Georgia
3. Spencer Rattler, Oklahoma
4. Desmond Ridder, Cincinnati
5. Sam Howell, North Carolina
6. Kedon Slovis, USC
7. D'Eriq King, Miami
8. Malik Willis, Liberty
9. Phil Jurkovec, Boston College
10. Brock Purdy, Iowa State

## RUNNING BACKS

1. Zamir White, Georgia
2. Breece Hall, Iowa State
3. Kyren Williams, Notre Dame
4. Isaiah Spiller, Texas A&M
5. Mohamed Ibrahim, Minnesota
6. Eric Gray, Oklahoma
7. Master Teague, Ohio State
8. CJ Verdell, Oregon
9. Zach Charbonnet, UCLA
10. Brian Robinson, Alabama

## WIDE RECEIVERS

1. Chris Olave, Ohio State
2. Frank Ladson Jr., Clemson
3. Garrett Wilson, Ohio State
4. Jahan Dotson, Penn State
5. George Pickens, Georgia
6. Romeo Doubs, Nevada
7. Charleston Rambo, Miami
8. Jadon Haselwood, Oklahoma
9. David Bell, Purdue
10. Justyn Ross, Clemson

## TIGHT ENDS

1. Jalen Wydermyer, Texas A&M
2. Charlie Kolar, Iowa State
3. Jake Ferguson, Wisconsin
4. Austin Stogner, Oklahoma
5. Braden Galloway, Clemson
6. Baylor Cupp, Texas A&M
7. Zaire Mitchell-Paden, Notre Dame College
8. Isaiah Likely, Coastal Carolina
9. Trae Berry, Jacksonville State
10. Major Tennison, Alabama

## OFFENSIVE TACKLES

1. Rasheed Walker, Penn State
2. Thayer Munford, Ohio State
3. Evan Neal, Alabama
4. Zion Nelson, Miami
5. Nick Broeker, Ole Miss
6. Daniel Faalele, Minnesota
7. Logan Brown, Wisconsin
8. Wanya Morris, Oklahoma
9. Tyler Vrabel, Boston College
10. Abraham Lucas, Washington State

## OFFENSIVE GUARDS

1. Kenyon Green, Texas A&M
2. Cade Mays, Tennessee
3. Marquis Hayes, Oklahoma
4. Zion Johnson, Boston College
5. Stewart Reese, Mississippi State
6. Andrew Vorhees, USC
7. Tyrese Robinson, Oklahoma
8. Ben Brown, Ole Miss
9. Ed Ingram, LSU
10. Brandon Council, Auburn

## CENTERS

1. Tyler Linderbaum, Iowa
2. Luke Matthews, Texas A&M
3. Jarrett Patterson, Notre Dame
4. Jack Wohlabaugh, Duke
5. Alec Lindstrom, Boston College
6. Chris Owens, Alabama
7. Liam Shanahan, LSU
8. Matt Allen, Michigan State
9. James Empey, BYU
10. Justin Dedich, USC

## DEFENSIVE ENDS

1. Kayvon Thibodeaux, Oregon
2. Myjai Sanders, Cincinnati
3. Demarvin Leal, Texas A&M
4. Kingsley Enagbare, South Carolina
5. Zach Harrison, Ohio State
6. George Karlaftis, Purdue
7. Ali Gaye, LSU
8. Drake Jackson, USC
9. Boye Mafe, Minnesota
10. Aidan Hutchinson, Michigan

## DEFENSIVE TACKLES

1. Jordan Davis, Georgia
2. Haskell Garrett, Ohio State
3. Phidarian Mathis, Alabama
4. Chris Hinton, Michigan
5. Jordan Williams, Clemson
6. Stanley Ta'ufo'ou, USC
7. Zacch Pickens, South Carolina
8. Cory Durden, Florida State
9. Esezi Otomewo, Minnesota
10. Tyler Davis, Clemson

## LINEBACKERS

1. Christian Harris, Alabama
2. Nik Bonitto, Oklahoma
3. Amare Barno, Virginia Tech
4. Amari Gainer, Florida State
5. Henry To'oto'o, Alabama
6. Owen Pappoe, Auburn
7. K'Vaughan Pope, Ohio State
8. Merlin Robertson, Arizona State
9. Adam Anderson, Georgia
10. JoJo Domann, Nebraska

## CORNERBACKS

1. Derek Stingley Jr., LSU
2. Josh Jobe, Alabama
3. Kaiir Elam, Florida
4. Isaac Taylor-Stuart, USC
5. Ahmad Gardner, Cincinnati
6. Sheridan Jones, Clemson
7. Trent McDuffie, Washington
8. Tyrique Stevenson, Miami
9. Tre'Vius Hodges-Tomlinson, TCU
10. Tiawan Mullen, Indiana

## SAFETIES

1. Kyle Hamilton, Notre Dame
2. Tykee Smith, West Virginia
3. Leon O'Neal, Texas A&M
4. Jaquan Brisker, Penn State
5. Kolby Harvell-Peel, Oklahoma State
6. Brandon Joseph, Northwestern
7. Ja'Von Hicks, Cincinnati
8. Todd Harris, LSU
9. Marcus Hooker, Ohio State
10. Isaiah Pola-Mao, USC

# TOP 10 STORYLINES

As usual, not all the storylines heading into the season are on the field:

**1. SAME AS IT EVER WAS** — Ohio State, Alabama and Clemson have risen head and shoulder pads above everyone else. Together, they have filled 16 of the 28 College Football Playoff spots to date (57 percent) and won six of the seven championships. That's not parity, that's subjugation.

All three face some degree of rebuild in 2021. You did see the 2021 NFL Draft, right?

All that said, it will be an upset if the Big Three don't all start 2021 in the top five and it would be no surprise at all if all three reach the College Football Playoff. Again.

**2. SABAN AT 70** — He's not quite there yet (Oct. 31), but Alabama's coach is in his 70th year, 29th as a head coach and chasing an eighth national championship. The Bryce Young era begins with Brian Robinson Jr. as the primary ball carrier. The defense that was the third-worst ever to win a national championship? Loaded. Saban is not slowing down.

**3. SEC CHAMPION** — It's a big deal because the SEC champ is a de facto playoff participant, if not champion. Because of those Alabama personnel losses, there is reason to believe Georgia could be/should be the SEC favorite. JT Daniels has Heisman potential in what would be the second full season of his career, which is now in Year 4. The Bulldogs defense is always strong.

**4. YEAR OF THE SUPER SENIOR** — Technically, no players ran out of eligibility in 2020. When COVID-19 hit, the NCAA awarded every player an extra year of eligibility. That means in 2021 there will be fifth-, sixth- and maybe even seventh-year seniors. Experience abounds. Flip through (and carefully read every word) our team previews; the number of returning starters everywhere is at an all-time high.

**5. THE LSU MESS** — Less than 18 months after winning a national championship, LSU is wrapped in controversy. There is an ongoing investigation into alleged sexual assault that may have happened on the watch of both Ed Orgeron and Les Miles. The biggest football question of the offseason — will it be Myles Brennan or Max Johnson at quarterback? — kind of pales in comparison.

**6. BEST IN THE WEST** — Oregon has won back-to-back Pac-12 titles. Up next? Become a College Football Playoff factor. The Pac-12 desperately needs someone in the league to step up. Defensive end Kayvon Thibodeaux has the tools to be the national Defensive Player of the Year, but who starts at QB? In any case, the Pac-12 will hope for a football renaissance in the same way men's basketball showed out in March.

**7. JIM HARBAUGH 7.0** — The bombastic Michigan coach who loudly announced himself back into the college game six years ago was quiet in the offseason. Headed into his seventh season, complete with a new contract, flamboyance has been replaced by humility. That was obvious after Harbs suffered his first losing season since 2008. Assistant coaches left. Players transferred. Fans grumbled. A lot.

**8. COVID 2.0** — Full stadiums, full regular season, full bowl schedule? That could happen, at least in some places, but it all could be a delicate dance, depending on how the summer goes. Consider this a pale silver lining: What 2020 showed was that schools found fast-twitch scheduling muscles that they had no idea they possessed.

**9. THE GROUP OF 5 RACE** — Cincinnati is the clear party-crashing favorite when it comes to the playoff, but the Bearcats aren't the only Group of 5 team that can muscle its way into the Top 25. Among the teams still loaded are Coastal Carolina, Ball State, Liberty, Louisiana, Nevada, Tulsa, Appalachian State, Boise State, San Jose State and more.

**10. BOUNCE-BACK TEAMS** — Was last season a sign of further decline or a pandemic blip? You make the call. Whatever the case, these proud programs can't stomach much more sustained losing: Florida State (2-6), Michigan (2-4), Nebraska (3-5), UCLA (3-4). On second thought, maybe UCLA doesn't even belong here. In the case of the gutty little Bruins, they so regularly underachieve we don't even consider it underachieving anymore. They just don't achieve.

Photo by AP Photo/Ron Jenkins

# Oklahoma's Rattler Growing Beyond the Hype

By John E. Hoover

Spencer Rattler just finished his first spring practice as Oklahoma's starting quarterback, and he has already been cast as the favorite to win the Heisman Trophy and become the No. 1 pick in next year's NFL Draft.

And yes, it's very early.

If he becomes the quarterback everyone says he will, Rattler's legacy would exceed even Baker Mayfield's and Kyler Murray's, and he'll achieve only what Josh Heupel has done in the last 35 years as a Sooner QB: win a national championship.

"You're naming guys that were Heisman Trophy quarterbacks," said longtime Oklahoma assistant coach and former Sooners QB Cale Gundy. "Guys that won a lot of championships, competed at a high level, set a lot of records. We definitely feel like Spencer is on that trajectory to head in that direction."

A year ago, Rattler was still trying to beat out Tanner Mordecai. Anyone who watched Rattler scrimmage or saw him play at Pinnacle High School in Phoenix or binged his "QB1" documentary on Netflix didn't give it a second thought.

But Riley needed to motivate the No. 1 dual-threat QB in the country in the 2019 class to keep working, keep improving.

Rattler won the job amid a pandemic. The Sooners had one spring practice last year before everything shut down, so he got creative with his workouts, did what he could via video conferencing, and studied the playbook in theory but not in practice.

And when the season finally opened, Rattler's talent only took him so far. He was good enough to win the job, but not good enough to win games yet. That's one reason why the Sooners lost to Kansas State and Iowa State to start Big 12 Conference play — OU's first 0-2 start since 1998.

In the fourth quarter of those games, Oklahoma's offense bogged down, Rattler's throwing windows shrank, and the Sooners went three-and-out. When his team needed touchdowns in the closing minutes in back-to-back weeks, Rattler threw game-ending interceptions.

Both failures were grow-up moments for the young QB with no spring practice and an odd summer and a disjointed training camp. But nothing accelerated Rattler's maturity quite like suffering two more turnovers against Texas, getting benched, and coming back out and leading his team to a four-overtime victory.

In the OTs, Rattler had two touchdown passes, a touchdown run and a clutch 2-point conversion pass.

From that point on, Rattler became the quarterback everyone thought he would be. And now for his sophomore season.

"I don't try to set a roof on what I can do as a player on the field," Rattler said. "I'm not overstressing or anything, I just go out there and play ball."

Riley said the 6-1, 210-pound Rat-

# ALL-AMERICA TEAM

tler needed improvement in areas that didn't have to do with throwing the football, like strength, fitness and leadership.

"There's so many areas for him to grow," Riley said. "We really challenged him physically to make some of the gains that he's capable of making — and needs to make.

"It's been a big push for him. It's involved his diet; it's involved the way he trains; the extra things that he does, the emphasis that he puts on it. We just feel like there was a lot of ground to make up there."

Rattler has noticed the difference.

"Offseason-wise, I've been making jumps," Rattler said. "Feel stronger. Feel faster. Put on some weight. I'm up to 210 now. I lost a couple percent body fat. Still gotta work on that of course. But I got sharpened up in all different places."

This for a player with a snap-quick release and seemingly unlimited throwing velocity.

"One thing that's kind of a little bit different with Spencer is the ability to make a lot of different throws with a lot of different arm angles," Gundy said.

"Probably, he throws the ball a lot of times in situations, or going to his left, or going backwards, where most coaches would say you should not be doing that. But this is something he's worked and he's trained ever since he was in high school."

In 11 games last season, Rattler threw for 3,031 yards and 28 touchdowns, and ran for 307 yards (not including sacks) and six touchdowns. He completed 67.5 percent with seven interceptions, and only two of those picks happened among his final 188 attempts. That shows his evolution after those first two games.

Now Rattler knows "these younger guys are looking up to me" and he's focused on being a leader.

"I want to be the most unstoppable quarterback," he said, "(the) best quarterback in the country coming up to this year and put on a show and do it with my guys."

## OFFENSE

Spencer Rattler

Breece Hall

Tank Bigsby

Chris Olave

Treylon Burks

Jalen Wydermyer

### FIRST TEAM

| Pos | Name | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | Spencer Rattler | 6-1 | 210 | So. | Oklahoma |
| RB | Breece Hall | 6-1 | 215 | Jr. | Iowa State |
| RB | Tank Bigsby | 6-0 | 208 | So. | Auburn |
| WR | Chris Olave | 6-1 | 189 | Sr. | Ohio State |
| WR | Treylon Burks | 6-3 | 225 | Jr. | Arkansas |
| TE | Jalen Wydermyer | 6-5 | 255 | Jr. | Texas A&M |
| C | Tyler Linderbaum | 6-3 | 289 | Jr. | Iowa |
| OL | Kenyon Green | 6-4 | 325 | Jr. | Texas A&M |
| OL | Zion Johnson | 6-3 | 310 | Sr. | Boston College |
| OL | Thayer Munford | 6-6 | 321 | Sr. | Ohio State |
| OL | Evan Neal | 6-7 | 360 | Jr. | Alabama |
| K | Cade York | 6-1 | 198 | Jr. | LSU |

### SECOND TEAM

| Pos | Name | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | Sam Howell | 6-1 | 225 | Jr. | North Carolina |
| RB | Bijan Robinson | 6-0 | 215 | So. | Texas |
| RB | Mohamed Ibrahim | 5-10 | 210 | Jr. | Minnesota |
| WR | Justyn Ross | 6-4 | 205 | Jr. | Clemson |
| WR | John Metchie III | 6-0 | 195 | Jr. | Alabama |
| TE | Charlie Kolar | 6-6 | 257 | Sr. | Iowa State |
| C | Alec Lindstrom | 6-3 | 295 | Sr. | Boston College |
| OL | Darian Kinnard | 6-5 | 345 | Sr. | Kentucky |
| OL | Rasheed Walker | 6-6 | 312 | So. | Penn State |
| OL | Jaxson Kirkland | 6-7 | 310 | Sr. | Washington |
| OL | Charles Cross | 6-5 | 305 | So. | Mississippi State |
| K | Gabe Brkic | 6-2 | 203 | Jr. | Oklahoma |

Tyler Linderbaum

Kenyon Green

Zion Johnson

Thayer Munford

Evan Neal

Cade York

# Davis Growing Up as Georgia's Ultimate Run-Stopper

By Brandon Sudge

Photo by Jay Biggerstaff-USA TODAY Sports

Tray Scott remembers a steamy summer's day when he was coaching at North Carolina and the Tar Heels hosted a camp. A basketball player caught the defensive line coach's eye.

There was Jordan Davis, a big-bodied Charlotte kid who had just started playing football as a high school sophomore. That's why this 320-pound athletic kid was still well under the radar: Davis wasn't much of a football player yet, but Scott only saw his natural ability.

He had a rare quality of athleticism for somebody his size. Scott has a checklist of technical skills when looking at a prospect, and Davis marked every box and now remembers, "I had never seen a big kid with that type of athleticism and ability to bend."

By the time he was being widely recruited, Scott had moved to Georgia as an assistant, and Davis says, "I would've gone with him wherever he ended up. Coach Scott saw something in me that I didn't even see in myself."

"He still does," the Bulldogs' fourth-year defensive tackle added, "because he holds me to a higher standard."

And following the Peach Bowl win over Cincinnati, Davis recognized that his 2020 season, which included only seven games because of an elbow injury, left him with more to do at Georgia. Rather than cast his lot with the NFL — he's freaky enough athletically that he might have been the No. 1 defensive tackle taken in 2021 — he chose to return for another year working with Scott and the Bulldogs.

"There wasn't that much of a decision to make, honestly," Davis said. "I want to cherish this moment, because not many people get this opportunity. It was too much to leave."

The off-the-field interactions that have created a home away from home are important to Davis.

As the nose tackle in Georgia's defense, he is the ultimate run-stopper, helping the Dawgs lead the nation in rushing defense in each of the past two seasons. Their 2.39 yards allowed per rushing attempt in 2020 was the best in major college football in the past five years and

# ALL-AMERICA TEAM

second-best in a decade.

But Davis has been less effective rushing the passer and strives to be a fully operational three-down player.

Davis put it rather directly: "I just want to win. I'll do whatever it takes. We want to make it to the promised land."

That includes continual conditioning for his 6-6, 340-pound frame.

"Jordan's biggest issue is conditioning and weight control," head coach Kirby Smart said. "The game of football is played so differently now and there are certain games that he is a much larger factor in ... it is critical that he is in the best shape of his life.

"He knows that and we've got to get him to cut some more for him to be elite."

In the spring, Davis would return to the team facilities after 9 p.m. for extra workouts, and he and fellow defensive tackle Devonte Wyatt worked with two chefs and nutritionist Collier Perno to meal prep and learn calorie counting and food substitutions.

Arguably the biggest need for Davis, however, is to soak in his final ride. He wants to remember the big plays, or the times when he shows up at Scott's house with a pack of fruit snacks for the coach's 3-year-old son.

Scott made it clear that his bond is everlasting, but only a leg of the journey ends at the season's conclusion. It all started when he found a basketball player in North Carolina, and now he's a family figure, not just the big No. 99 at the base of the Georgia defense.

Davis wants to make the most of his senior year.

"I want to make sure everyone is proud of me when it's all said and done — especially Coach Scott and my mom," Davis said. "I want to be the best I can be."

## DEFENSE

Kayvon Thibodeaux

DeMarvin Leal

Jordan Davis

Haskell Garrett

Christian Harris

Will Anderson Jr.

### FIRST TEAM

| Pos | Name | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DL | Kayvon Thibodeaux | 6-5 | 250 | Jr. | Oregon |
| DL | DeMarvin Leal | 6-4 | 290 | Jr. | Texas A&M |
| DL | Jordan Davis | 6-6 | 340 | Sr. | Georgia |
| DL | Haskell Garrett | 6-2 | 300 | Sr. | Ohio State |
| LB | Christian Harris | 6-2 | 232 | Jr. | Alabama |
| LB | Will Anderson Jr. | 6-4 | 235 | So. | Alabama |
| LB | Mike Rose | 6-4 | 245 | Sr. | Iowa State |
| DB | Derek Stingley Jr. | 6-1 | 185 | Jr. | LSU |
| DB | Ahmad Gardner | 6-2 | 188 | Jr. | Cincinnati |
| DB | Kyle Hamilton | 6-4 | 219 | Jr. | Notre Dame |
| DB | Brandon Joseph | 6-1 | 192 | So. | Northwestern |
| P | Jake Camarda | 6-2 | 180 | Sr. | Georgia |

### SECOND TEAM

| Pos | Name | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DL | Bryan Bresee | 6-5 | 300 | So. | Clemson |
| DL | George Karlaftis | 6-4 | 275 | Jr. | Purdue |
| DL | Myjai Sanders | 6-5 | 258 | Sr. | Cincinnati |
| DL | Drake Jackson | 6-4 | 255 | Jr. | USC |
| LB | Devin Lloyd | 6-3 | 232 | Jr. | Utah |
| LB | Nik Bonitto | 6-3 | 234 | Jr. | Oklahoma |
| LB | James Skalski | 6-0 | 240 | Sr. | Clemson |
| DB | Kaiir Elam | 6-2 | 195 | Jr. | Florida |
| DB | Josh Jobe | 6-1 | 192 | Sr. | Alabama |
| DB | Tiawan Mullen | 5-10 | 175 | So. | Indiana |
| DB | Sevyn Banks | 6-1 | 200 | Sr. | Ohio State |
| P | Lou Hedley | 6-4 | 225 | Sr. | Miami |

Mike Rose

Derek Stingley Jr.

Ahmad Gardner

Kyle Hamilton

Brandon Joseph

Jake Camarda

# PLAYER RATINGS

# QUARTERBACKS

SAM HOWELL

Photo by Adam Richins-USA TODAY Sports

## For Carolina's Howell, it's all about the process

Sam Howell understands that the competitive process doesn't begin and end with game day.

The junior quarterback from Indian Trail, N.C., is trying to help direct that process for the North Carolina Tar Heels as they seek their first Top 10 season since before he was born. It's a painstaking process that could lead him all the way to the 2021 Heisman Trophy.

Howell has the stuff to back up a Heisman candidacy — 7,408 yards of total offense in two seasons with a remarkable 74 total touchdowns (68 passing) — and he views the coming season as a chance to help direct the Tar Heels to greater heights while knowing that he'll be under the microscope.

"As far as the national attention and the awards and the NFL stuff, I try not to worry about it," Howell said. "I try to focus on my team and try to give my team everything I can."

Howell was headed to Florida State before reversing ground late in the recruiting process when Mack Brown returned to North Carolina after more than two decades away.

Back when Brown coached Carolina the first time around in the '90s, the Heels twice finished in the Top 10, and were very much a part of the national championship race despite being overshadowed by perennial ACC favorite Florida State.

UNC finished as high as No. 6 in 1997, the program's high-water mark of seven decades ... since before even Brown was born.

Now, they're trying to do the same ... overshadowed now by perennial ACC favorite Clemson.

Brown sees that Howell understands the bigger picture, that rather than chasing Clemson, improvement goes furthest when driven from within.

"He kind of lives with that chip on his shoulder to show everybody how great he is," Brown said. "So, I think the challenge of being a Top 10 preseason team, a challenge of him being one of the best quarterbacks in the country is really healthy for him.

"I don't know if I've ever seen a guy work harder than Sam Howell has just to get himself ready."

And Howell has experienced the success that comes when preparation meets opportunity. Before he stepped into the huddle as the first true freshman to start an opener in program history, UNC was coming off back-to-back nine-loss seasons.

Sixty-eight touchdown passes later, the Heels are coming off back-to-back bowl appearances, including the Orange Bowl after making their way briefly into the Top 10 in 2020.

Among the most notable moments came last Nov. 14 when the team fell behind Wake Forest, 45-21 in the third quarter, and he took it as an opportunity to lead one of the most stunning comebacks in school history. Howell threw for 550 yards and accounted for seven touchdowns in a 59-53 triumph.

Now that he's tasked to click with several new receiving targets he said he enjoys the process of "just trying to get timing down with these new receivers and new backs and just kind of get a feel for the offense."

The better that feel becomes, the better they'll compete on Saturdays. Collectively, the Tar Heels have been following that lead.

"You pay attention to him," said Tar Heels running back Javonte Williams, who became the 35th player selected in April's NFL Draft. "You respect him."

UNC's stock is rising largely because of a quarterback capable of seizing the moment.

"I want to do everything I can to help this team get better so we can win more games in the fall," Howell said. "This year I think my leadership will really be challenged. We've got a lot of young guys that are going to have to step up and play."

And if they follow the process? They might just land a full-fledged Top 10 season, and he might just wind up in a New York ballroom on Dec. 11.

*— Bob Sutton*

### TOP QUARTERBACKS

| RK | NAME | CLASS | COLLEGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Spencer Rattler** | So. | **Oklahoma** |
| | Sign of a Heisman frontrunner: 3,031 yards, 28 TDs in first season as starter. | | |
| 2. | **Sam Howell** | Jr. | **North Carolina** |
| | Posted back-to-back 3,500-yard, 30-TD seasons for Tar Heels. Oh, is that all? | | |
| 3. | **JT Daniels** | Jr. | **Georgia** |
| | Ex-USC phenom, started last four games with Bulldogs, including 401-yard debut. | | |
| 4. | **Brock Purdy** | Sr. | **Iowa State** |
| | Growing ISU legend is active FBS passing leader with 8,982 yards; has 80 career TDs. | | |
| 5. | **D'Eriq King** | Sr. | **Miami** |
| | King can fling — 73 career passing TDs — and has some jets (when ACL is healthy). | | |
| 6. | **D.J. Uiagalelei** | So. | **Clemson** |
| | We're not saying he's the No. 1 pick in the 2023 draft. But we're not NOT saying it. | | |
| 7. | **Desmond Ridder** | Sr. | **Cincinnati** |
| | Do-it-all QB had 2,800+ yards of total offense in each of three seasons with Bearcats. | | |
| 8. | **Malik Willis** | Sr. | **Liberty** |
| | Ex-Auburn QB rose to fame by leading Liberty's fab season; major run-pass skills. | | |
| 9. | **Matt Corral** | Jr. | **Ole Miss** |
| | He and Kiffin connect: Completed 70.9 percent of passes for 3,337 yards, 29 TDs in 2020. | | |
| 10. | **Kedon Slovis** | Jr. | **USC** |
| | Captain Clutch had 30-TD debut in 2019; followed up with 17 TDs in six games in 2020. | | |
| 11. | **Carson Strong** | Jr. | **Nevada** |
| | Pro-style pocket passers exist! Led Mountain West with 2,858 yards, 27 TDs in nine games. | | |
| 12. | **Bryce Young** | Fr. | **Alabama** |
| | Next big thing in Tuscaloosa played in nine games in 2020; No. 2 player in '20 class. | | |
| 13. | **Phil Jurkovec** | Jr. | **Boston College** |
| | Passed for 2,558 yards, 17 TDs in first season with BC after two at Notre Dame. | | |
| 14. | **Michael Penix Jr.** | Jr. | **Indiana** |
| | Let's all remember the 491 passing yards vs. Ohio State and hope he stays healthy. | | |
| 15. | **Grayson McCall** | So. | **Coastal Carolina** |
| | Runs offense to perfection: 33 total TDs, 3,000+ yards of offense in magical 2020. | | |
| 16. | **Dillon Gabriel** | Jr. | **UCF** |
| | Has 61 passing TDs in two years; monster 2020 with 357 yards per game, 32 TDs. | | |
| 17. | **Jayden Daniels** | Jr. | **Arizona State** |
| | We're not sure of the first-round buzz, but he's just scratched the surface for sure. | | |
| 18. | **Dustin Crum** | Sr. | **Kent State** |
| | First-team All-MAC in 2020, when Flashes averaged 49.8 points in four games. | | |
| 19. | **Dorian Thompson-Robinson** | Sr. | **UCLA** |
| | Still improving: Had 15 total TDs in five games last season, twice passed for 4 TDs. | | |
| 20. | **Graham Mertz** | So. | **Wisconsin** |
| | Amazing 2020 debut (20 of 21, 248 yards, 5 TD) set stage for promising career. | | |
| 21. | **CJ Stroud** | Fr. | **Ohio State** |
| | Sure, a lot of projection here, but what if this is actually too low? | | |
| 22. | **Spencer Sanders** | Jr. | **Oklahoma State** |
| | Too many turnovers, but he'll grow out of it. Talented kid finished well in 2020. | | |
| 23. | **Tyler Shough** | Jr. | **Texas Tech** |
| | Former Oregon starter tallied 15 TDs in 2020 before moving on to Lubbock. | | |
| 24. | **Tanner Morgan** | Sr. | **Minnesota** |
| | Consider his monster 2019 (3,253 passing yards, 31 total TDs), but 2020 was "meh." | | |
| 25. | **Bo Nix** | Jr. | **Auburn** |
| | 2021: Bo unleashed! Dual threat should thrive in coach Bryan Harsin's offense. | | |

# PLAYER RATINGS

# RUNNING BACKS

## Tank set to embark on new Auburn 'offensive'

What are three things a great running back and a world-class tank have in common?

Give up? Well …

No. 1 — They are both primary offensive weapons.

No. 2 — They can operate at a high rate of speed while maintaining agility and maneuverability on the ground.

No. 3 — They can give or take a tremendous amount of punishment while also taking the will of an opponent en route to a victory.

Photo by Joe Robbins

CARTAVIOUS "TANK" BIGSBY

On the gridiron, a team loves to have an elite primary offensive weapon, and that formula applies when it comes to Auburn sophomore running back Cartavious Bigsby, who owns one of the coolest nicknames in college football.

Bigsby — a.k.a. "Tank" — received the legendary call-sign from his mother Shaquanna while a youngster in west Georgia.

"I got my nickname from my Mom when I was playing rec football; the way that I ran the ball when I was little," Bigsby recalled. "I was 8 years old."

Growing up in LaGrange, Ga., Bigsby, a 6-foot, 208-pound battering ram who owns a lethal stiff-arm, eventually grew into a household name due to his playing ability and, of course, *that nickname*.

He was rated one of the nation's top prep running backs while at Callaway High School and enrolled early in Auburn in January 2020 after rushing for 1,636 yards and 27 touchdowns as a senior.

But then the unexpected happened and the COVID-19 pandemic hit, pausing college football and creating so many challenges for players — weekly testing, quarantine, isolation, uncertainty — when it resumed.

"My biggest challenge was sacrificing really everything because you couldn't do anything because of COVID," Bisgby said "Being a team player and putting my team first, I didn't want to get anyone sick. … But it was really hard, especially as a freshman."

When the Tigers returned to action in the SEC opener against Kentucky, Bigsby got limited touches. But one thing was certain: he had the "it" factor so many coaches talk about. And it showed on a 30-yard kickoff return and a couple of tough runs in which he shed would-be tacklers like a rag doll.

The following week, Tank, a tremendous cut-back runner, made his first start against the team he grew up rooting for, the Georgia Bulldogs, and was Auburn's best offensive player.

He was limited to just 30 yards rushing, but he flashed his versatility as a receiver/returner by hauling in seven receptions — including a beautiful one-handed snag — for 68 yards while adding four kick returns for 72 yards.

The next week, Bigsby, set an Auburn freshman record with 268 all-purpose yards (146 rushing, 106 KOR, 16 receiving) in a 30-28 win over Arkansas. It would also mark the beginning of three consecutive 100-yard rushing games in a row for the dynamic runner, also a record.

In the 10-game SEC only schedule, Bigsby finished eighth in the conference in all-purpose yardage (122.4 per game) and fifth in rushing yards (834), which was the second-most yards by any FBS freshman. Only quarterback Bo Nix (seven) had more rushing scores (five).

He capped the season with a career high 192 yards on 26 carries in 24-10 win over Mississippi State. It was the third-highest rushing total ever by an Auburn freshman.

Interestingly enough, Tank's favorite player growing up was Todd Gurley, who operated in current Auburn offensive coordinator Mike Bobo's offense while at Georgia.

Tank hopes to play a similar role for new head coach Bryan Harsin in Bobo's offense as Gurley did years ago.

"I think I'll be a great fit in Coach Bobo's offense because growing up watching Todd Gurley all my life, they ran the same offense," Bigsby said. "He coached him. Just being around him and seeing the energy he has, I feel like once we (offense) get the offense down, it will be great."

*— Matt Lowe*

### TOP RUNNING BACKS

| RK | NAME | CLASS | COLLEGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Breece Hall** | Jr. | Iowa State |
| | Led FBS with 1,572 yards in 2020, scored at least 2 TDs in nine of 12 games. | | |
| 2. | **Tank Bigsby** | So. | Auburn |
| | 834 yards in 2020, most by Auburn freshman since Michael Dyer in 2010. | | |
| 3. | **Bijan Robinson** | So. | Texas |
| | Ran for 703 yards on just 86 carries; now gets full season in Sark's offense. | | |
| 4. | **Mohamed Ibrahim** | Sr. | Minnesota |
| | Has 2,840 yards, 31 TDs in three seasons; needs 10 rushing TDs for school record. | | |
| 5. | **Kyren Williams** | So. | Notre Dame |
| | Posted six 100-yard games, 1,125 yards overall in first season as starter. | | |
| 6. | **Isaiah Spiller** | Jr. | Texas A&M |
| | Has 1,982 rushing yards, 19 TDs in first 2 seasons; 174 yards, 2 TDs in upset of Florida. | | |
| 7. | **Kevin Harris** | Jr. | South Carolina |
| | Second in SEC with 1,138 yards and 15 TDs, averaged 6.15 YPC. | | |
| 8. | **Zamir White** | Jr. | Georgia |
| | Former five-star shares deep backfield; 779 yards and 11 TDs in 10 games last season. | | |
| 9. | **Jarek Broussard** | So. | Colorado |
| | Pac-12 rushing leader with 895 yards, including 301 vs. Arizona; torn ACLs in '18/'19. | | |
| 10. | **Brian Robinson Jr.** | Sr. | Alabama |
| | Ready to be the featured back; 1,381 yards and 15 TDs in Bama career. | | |
| 11. | **CJ. Verdell** | Jr. | Oregon |
| | Injury-plagued 2020 followed 1,000-yard seasons in 2018 and 19. | | |
| 12. | **Deuce Vaughn** | So. | Kansas State |
| | Led Wildcats in rushing and receiving, best freshman campaign in school history. | | |
| 13. | **Leddie Brown** | Sr. | West Virginia |
| | Was a 1,000-yard rusher in 2020, had 11 total TDs; 50 career receptions. | | |
| 14. | **Tyler Goodson** | Jr. | Iowa |
| | Was third in Big Ten with 762 yards; Iowa 5-0 when he runs for 100-plus yards. | | |
| 15. | **Sincere McCormick** | Jr. | UTSA |
| | No. 2 rusher in nation in 2020 with 1,467 yards. | | |
| 16. | **Master Teague III** | Jr. | Ohio State |
| | Should be No. 1 option in backfield after splitting time w/Trey Sermon. | | |
| 17. | **Tyler Allgeier** | So. | BYU |
| | Averaged 7.53 ypc last season, ran for 100+ yards in each of final four games. | | |
| 18. | **Chris Rodriguez** | Jr. | Kentucky |
| | Had 785 yards, 11 TDs in 2020; 1,300+ yards and 17 scores in career. | | |
| 19. | **Jerrion Ealy** | Jr. | Ole Miss |
| | All-purpose threat has 20 total TDs in two seasons; had kickoff return TDs in 2019/20. | | |
| 20. | **Kennedy Brooks** | Jr. | Oklahoma |
| | Returns after 2020 opt-out in now-loaded OU backfield that includes Eric Gray. | | |
| 21. | **Hassan Haskins** | Jr. | Michigan |
| | Strong runner with good balance through contact; 5.5 YPC through three seasons. | | |
| 22. | **Xazavian Valladay** | Sr. | Wyoming |
| | Two-time first-team All-Mountain West; ran for 1,265 yards in 2019 full season. | | |
| 23. | **Zonovan Knight** | Jr. | NC State |
| | Averaging 5.49 yards per carry in first two seasons; 1,533 career yards. | | |
| 24. | **Ulysses Bentley IV** | So. | SMU |
| | Rushed for 11 TDs and was first-team All-AAC as redshirt freshman in 2020. | | |
| 25. | **Rachaad White** | Jr. | Arizona State |
| | Averaged 10.0 (!) yards per carry in four games and ran for 420 yards. | | |

# PLAYER RATINGS

# RECEIVERS

CHRIS OLAVE

Photo by Kyle Robertson/Columbus Dispatch/ USATNSYNDICATION

## Buckeyes' Olave is back to erase bad-taste ending of '20

When Chris Olave told his teammates he was returning to Ohio State for his senior season, Garrett Wilson was caught by surprise.

Ohio State's other star receiver had assumed Olave would enter the 2021 NFL Draft, knowing he was projected to be an early-round pick. Now that both of them are back for another year with the Buckeyes, though, Wilson is thinking about just how good their wideout unit could be this season.

"When you're as good as Chris, you think those dudes get gone," Wilson said this spring. "So I was surprised, but I knew that we were going to be back — hopefully right back where we were last year with a chance to compete for everything we want.

"So we expect to have one of the best rooms in the country, and having Chris back, that's going to be a huge part of that."

Olave has already done enough in just three seasons to establish himself as one of Ohio State's all-time great receivers. After catching 50 passes for 729 yards and seven touchdowns in just seven games last season, the 6-1, 189-pound speedster ranks sixth in school history with 22 receiving touchdowns and 16th in school history with 111 receptions for 1,776 yards.

He had five 100-yard receiving games last season, and he's within reach of a couple of impressive Ohio State career records, needing 1,123 more yards (Michael Jenkins, 2,898, 2001-03) and 13 more touchdowns (David Boston, 34, 1996-98) to top the Buckeyes' all-time lists.

What's truly defined Olave's legacy are the clutch plays he's made in some of Ohio State's biggest games, from his two receiving touchdowns and blocked punt as a freshman against Michigan, to his two touchdown catches in last year's College Football Playoff win over Clemson ... the guy is a big-play maker.

Ryan Day said last fall that, of all the wide receivers he's coached, Olave is "probably the best I've been around."

"Chris is tough. Chris plays on special teams; he blocks; he can catch balls over the middle. So when you combine those kind of attributes, he's special," Day said. "He's stepped up in big moments, so he's also clutch."

The product of San Ysidro, Calif., could probably be playing in the NFL right now, but he didn't want to leave Ohio State on a sour note after Alabama blew out the Buckeyes, 52-24, in the National Championship Game. Nor did he want to leave Ohio State without a degree, he said, after seeing his older brothers Isiah (UC Davis) and Josh (Weber State) earn theirs via college football.

"I'm a competitor, so after that national championship, I had a terrible feeling in my stomach," Olave said. "I just didn't want to leave college like that."

That and he's anxious to take his game to another level.

"I came back to try to get in the weight room more, get a lot stronger ... turn into a complete receiver," he said, "and try to be NFL-ready Week 1 when I get to that."

Olave won't be catching passes from Justin Fields this season. Instead, his quarterback will be C.J. Stroud, Jack Miller or Kyle McCord, none of whom have thrown a college pass. But he'll be part of what should be the best group of pass-catchers in the country.

Olave and Wilson earned first-team All-Big Ten honors last year, Jeremy Ruckert is one of the nation's most talented tight ends, and younger receivers Jaxon Smith-Njigba, Julian Fleming, Emeka Egbuka and Marvin Harrison Jr. were all high-level recruits.

That gives Olave a lot of confidence about what the Buckeyes could accomplish in 2021.

"Growing up dreaming, I always wanted to win a national championship," Olave said. "So I felt like we had unfinished business. I believe in the quarterback play; I believe in Coach Day; I believe in the program."

*— Dan Hope*

### TOP WIDE RECEIVERS

| RK | NAME | CLASS | COLLEGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Chris Olave** | Sr. | Ohio State |
| | Buckeyes' top target last 2 seasons with 99 catches for 1,578 yards, 19 TDs. | | |
| 2. | **Treylon Burks** | Jr. | Arkansas |
| | Boffo combo of size, strength and speed. Big-play guy looks like a linebacker. | | |
| 3. | **Justyn Ross** | Jr. | Clemson |
| | Missed 2020 due to injury. Career: 112 catches for 1,865 yards and 17 TDs. | | |
| 4. | **John Metchie III** | Jr. | Alabama |
| | Crimson Tide's new go-to: Made 55 catches, 916 yards, 6 TDs last year. | | |
| 5. | **Garrett Wilson** | Jr. | Ohio State |
| | Former 5-star posted 73 catches, 11 TDs in first two college seasons. | | |
| 6. | **David Bell** | Jr. | Purdue |
| | Big Ten co-leader with eight TDs, second with 53 receptions. | | |
| 7. | **Ty Fryfogle** | Sr. | Indiana |
| | Averaged 19+ YPC, monster game vs. Ohio State (7 rec. 218 yards, 3 TD). | | |
| 8. | **Drake London** | Jr. | USC |
| | Super size; had 69 catches, 1,007 yards and 8 TDs over last 13 games played. | | |
| 9. | **Romeo Doubs** | Jr. | Nevada |
| | Led Mountain West with 58 catches, 1,002 yards and 9 TDs. | | |
| 10. | **Kayson Boutte** | So. | LSU |
| | All kinds of potential; ended with 14-catch, 308-yard, 3 TD game vs. Ole Miss. | | |
| 11. | **Jahan Dotson** | Jr. | Penn State |
| | Led Big Ten with 884 receiving yards, tied for top spot with 8 TDs. | | |
| 12. | **Zay Flowers** | Jr. | Boston College |
| | ACC leader with 9 TD catches, 4th with 892 receiving yards. | | |
| 13. | **Khalil Shakir** | Sr. | Boise State |
| | Has six career 100-yard games and 131 career receptions. | | |
| 14. | **Jaquarii Roberson** | Sr. | Wake Forest |
| | Second in ACC in catches (62) and TDs (8) in 2020. | | |
| 15. | **Xavier Hutchinson** | Sr. | Iowa State |
| | Big 12 leader with 64 catches in 2020; league's Offensive Newcomer of Year. | | |
| 16. | **Erik Ezukanma** | Jr. | Texas Tech |
| | 88 catches for 1,412 yards and 10 TDs last two seasons. | | |
| 17. | **Jaivon Heiligh** | Jr. | Coastal Carolina |
| | 10th in FBS with 65 receptions in 2020; had 24 catches in last two games. | | |
| 18. | **Marvin Mims** | So. | Oklahoma |
| | Part of Sooner's great WR room; led OU with 37 catches, 610 yards, 9 TDs. | | |
| 19. | **Jaylon Robinson** | Jr. | UCF |
| | An ex-Oklahoma Sooner, "Flash" had 55 catches, 979 yards, 6 TDs for UCF. | | |
| 20. | **Jalen Tolbert** | Jr. | South Alabama |
| | Averaging 17+ yards on 96 career catches; had 252 yards, 3 TDs vs. Ark. St. | | |

### TOP TIGHT ENDS

| RK | NAME | CLASS | COLLEGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Jalen Wydermyer** | Jr. | Texas A&M |
| | 78 catches and 12 TDs in two seasons, 18 straight games with a reception. | | |
| 2. | **Charlie Kolar** | Sr. | Iowa State |
| | 17 TDs in career, 7 each past two seasons, Mackey Award finalist. | | |
| 3. | **Jake Ferguson** | Sr. | Wisconsin |
| | Led Badgers in receptions (30), yards (305) and TDs (4). | | |
| 4. | **Isaiah Likely** | Sr. | Coastal Carolina |
| | 13 career TDs, averaged 20+ yards per reception in 2020. | | |
| 5. | **Michael Mayer** | So. | Notre Dame |
| | We may tire of "Baby Gronk" nickname; but not watching him (42 catches as frosh). | | |

# PLAYER RATINGS

# OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

## Iowa's Linderbaum has no trouble centering his focus

Two years into his time as Iowa's starting center, Tyler Linderbaum could have opted to move on to the next stop in his football life: The NFL.

Instead, the kid from Solon, Iowa, decided to wear his No. 65 black and gold jersey for another year.

### TOP CENTERS

| RK | NAME | CLASS | COLLEGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Tyler Linderbaum** | Jr. | Iowa |
| | Rimington Award finalist has started 21 straight games for Hawkeyes. | | |
| 2. | **Alec Lindstrom** | Sr. | Boston College |
| | First-team All-ACC selection anchors Eagles' line, which returns intact. | | |
| 3. | **Colin Newell** | Sr. | Iowa State |
| | All-Big 12 coaches selection from 2020 has 26 career starts. | | |
| 4. | **Jarrett Patterson** | Sr. | Notre Dame |
| | Likely moving off of center this season, but he's been an anchor there for ND. | | |
| 5. | **Dohnovan West** | So. | Arizona State |
| | All-Pac-12 guard moving to natural position of center for 2021 season. | | |
| 6. | **Ricky Stromberg** | Jr. | Arkansas |
| | Began career at OG, moved into middle under new staff in 2020 and thrived. | | |

### TOP GUARDS

| RK | NAME | CLASS | COLLEGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Kenyon Green** | Jr. | Texas A&M |
| | Consensus All-American likely to play LT on rebuilt A&M line, OG is his NFL future. | | |
| 2. | **Zion Johnson** | Sr. | Boston College |
| | Back to LG, where he started 7 games in 2019, after playing LT in 2020. | | |
| 3. | **Marquis Hayes** | Jr. | Oklahoma |
| | First-team All-Big 12 selection has 24 starts at LG; allowed only 2 sacks in 2020. | | |
| 4. | **Cade Mays** | Sr. | Tennessee |
| | Knoxville native started seven games for Vols after transfer from Georgia. | | |
| 5. | **Cain Madden** | Sr. | Marshall |
| | Former walk-on earned second-team All-American honors last season. | | |
| 6. | **Jamaree Salyer** | Sr. | Georgia |
| | Has lined up all over the line, but guard is best fit for potential 2022 first-rounder. | | |
| 7. | **Ed Ingram** | Sr. | LSU |
| | Entering third season as starter on line that expects to return all 5 from 2020. | | |
| 8. | **Lecitus Smith** | Jr. | Virginia Tech |
| | Turned into 320-pound mauler; considered turning pro after making 27 starts. | | |

### TOP TACKLES

| RK | NAME | CLASS | COLLEGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Thayer Munford** | Sr. | Ohio State |
| | Entering fourth season as Buckeyes' starting LT, has 46 career starts. | | |
| 2. | **Evan Neal** | Jr. | Alabama |
| | Freshman All-American at left guard heading into second season at tackle. | | |
| 3. | **Darian Kinnard** | Sr. | Kentucky |
| | All-SEC first-teamer has 33 career starts, including last 26 games for Wildcats. | | |
| 4. | **Rasheed Walker** | So. | Penn State |
| | Moving into third year as starting left tackle and ticketed for 2022 first round. | | |
| 5. | **Jaxson Kirkland** | Sr. | Washington |
| | Has 29 career starts at guard and tackle, was All-Pac-12 last season. | | |
| 6. | **Charles Cross** | So. | Mississippi State |
| | Made SEC All-Freshman team after starting all 10 games at left tackle. | | |
| 7. | **Peter Skoronski** | So. | Northwestern |
| | Top-rated true freshman in Big Ten by Pro Football Focus. | | |
| 8. | **Ben Petrula** | Sr. | Boston College |
| | Going into 5th year as starter, third year at RT after 2020 at RG, 2018 at C | | |
| 9. | **Zion Nelson** | So. | Miami |
| | Still raw, but he's working with first-round tools and pointing toward greatness. | | |
| 10. | **Abraham Lucas** | Sr. | Washington State |
| | Fourth year starting at RT; was Freshman All-American in 2018. | | |

TYLER LINDERBAUM

Photo by Bryon Houlgrave/The Register/ USATNSYNDICATION

"I didn't give leaving much consideration at all," Linderbaum said. "I knew I wanted to come back for another year. Possibly two."

No one would have blamed the 6-3, 290-pound center if he had left, but he didn't want to disrupt his focus on improving.

In 2020, Linderbaum earned All-Big Ten honors, along with first-team All-America honors from several publications, and was one of three finalists for the Rimington Award, given annually to the top center in the country.

Not bad for a kid who began as a defensive tackle before Hawkeyes coach Kirk Ferentz told him at the end of 2018 that he would be better suited for the other side of the football. That meant Linderbaum would need to learn a new position, new techniques and tendencies, even a new playbook before he'd ever see the field in 2019.

Still, by the season-opener that September, he had already earned a spot in the starting lineup, and he's been the Hawkeyes' starting center ever since.

Ferentz, as usual, declines to compare players past and present, but he did acknowledge that Linderbaum's performance and approach is exemplary.

"I'll just say this: I haven't been around many centers in college football better than Tyler Linderbaum. I'll leave it at that," Ferentz said. "I've been here 30 plus years. Joel Hilgenberg was a pretty good center."

Hilgenberg was "pretty good" enough to play in the National Football League for a decade.

"I'm not saying he's better than Hilgy...." Ferentz said, but was clearly suggesting that Linderbaum was right there.

And now Linderbaum is hyperfocused on getting better yet.

"I know I need to be more consistent and there are plays that show up every day in the film room where I can see I need to get better," he said. "I've always been improvement driven in everything I do and the reason I came back is that I know there's a lot to improve upon."

That competitive drive was apparent at Solon High School, where he was a four-sport standout. He said he tried every sport the school offered at one point or another to test his competitive edge.

He also said his season on the defensive side of the ball helped him form some of the positive habits and establish some of the leadership skills that serve him well heading into the season.

"When I came to Iowa my freshman year, I was fortunate to have a bunch of good leaders in the defensive line room," he said. "A big thing for me was learning from them and asking them questions and soaking up as much as I could from them.

"I am trying to do that now for the young guys coming along to ask questions and to not be afraid to ask me anything."

Left tackle Jack Plumb said flatly, "He's the guy really leading the room. All of the players listen to what he has to say, and in a lot of ways he's leading the team meetings from a player perspective."

Linderbaum also leads by example on the field.

"I'm really just focused on preparing for the season and helping make my teammates as good as possible," he said. "I've really never listened to or been interested in what people on the outside are saying so I'm not going to start doing that now."

Those "people on the outside" include folks on the College Advisory Committee, which offers players inside information on their prospects for the NFL. Linderbaum didn't even ask their opinion. He knew he wasn't leaving.

That's focus.

*— Tom Kakert*

# PLAYER RATINGS

# DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

## With Thibodeaux, the 'Joker' is on Oregon opponents

KAYVON THIBODEAUX

Photo by Brian Rothmuller/Icon Sportswire via AP Images

Kayvon Thibodeaux has been an imposing force since the first day he put on the Pop Warner pads.

The 6-foot-5, 250-pound athlete on the end is the highest-ranked recruit ever to sign at Oregon. Thibodeaux was the Pac-12 Defensive Freshman of the Year in 2019 and a third-team All-American in 2020 playing for former Ducks defensive coordinator Andy Avalos, who is now the head coach at Boise State.

While getting up to speed with Tim DeRuyter's scheme during the spring, Thibodeaux revealed his plan to strike the Heisman pose this December.

"Coach DeRuyter does have a great plan in place. One of my goals is to try to win the Heisman," Thibodeaux said. "He honestly just puts me in more positions to make plays. A lot of guys, honestly, not just me."

DeRuyter might be the ideal defensive coordinator to get the most out of Thibodeaux before he takes his talent to the NFL as a possible No. 1 overall pick in the 2022 draft. DeRuyter's blueprint for Thibodeaux will resemble the one he used as Texas A&M's defensive coordinator in 2010, when Von Miller had 10.5 sacks, 17.5 tackles for loss and won the Butkus Award.

Miller didn't finish in the top 10 in the Heisman voting, but he parlayed the success with DeRuyter and the Aggies into becoming the No. 2 pick in the draft. He later became the Super Bowl MVP and signed the biggest contract ever for a defensive player at the time. But now we're getting a little ahead of ourselves.

Oregon is not resisting such comparisons.

"We feel that he can be the best player in the county," Oregon coach Mario Cristobal said when asked about the expectations surrounding Thibodeaux, both from the outside and self-generated.

"It's safe saying that because, knowing him, he's going to use that as motivation. He's not a guy that allows it to go to his head. He's going to be energized; he's going to take on challenges; he's going to allow us to push him and get the most out of him.

"Big, big future for him. As big as it gets, sky's the limit. And he knows the sky is the limit for our program and he's going to be leading that charge."

Thibodeaux has 12 sacks and 23.5 tackles for loss in 20 games at Oregon. During last year's Pac-12 championship game, the Los Angeles product put on a show in his hometown with 12 quarterback pressures, two tackles for loss and a sack to earn MVP honors in the Ducks' 31-24 win over USC.

Opposing teams will have to game-plan around Thibodeaux, but the Ducks have recruited other rising stars at linebacker (Noah Sewell, Justin Flowe) and in the secondary (Jamal Hill, Mykael Wright, Verone McKinley).

The only player that has consistently matched Thibodeaux blow-for-blow at the line of scrimmage has been former Oregon left tackle Penei Sewell.

Thibodeaux was the conference's Defensive Freshman of the Year in 2019, when Sewell won the Outland Trophy as the Ducks handled physical Utah in the Pac-12 title game and outmuscled Wisconsin in the second half of the Rose Bowl.

"Penei gave me that confidence," Thibodeaux said of the first lineman selected in the 2021 NFL Draft (No. 7 by the Detroit Lions). "He's the best guy in the country, so it was like once I did that every day, I could go against anybody."

Thibodeaux will play the "Joker" role for DeRuyter, which is a hybrid position where the player lines up in a three-point stance on the end or stands up as an outside linebacker. Even when Oregon's defense played basic alignments during spring practice, the experienced offensive line had trouble dealing with his daily disruptions.

"K.T. brings a different level of intensity to practice every day. I respect it, I love it," quarterback Anthony Brown said.

"I'm happy that he brings that every day because you don't get that talent everywhere in the country where you can see it every day in practice. He's coming every single play; he doesn't take any plays off, and hat's off to him. He's a special guy."

It will take all that and more for a defensive player to get the attention of Heisman voters. He would need to produce dominant stats and a weekly SportsCenter highlight while leading the Ducks to a Pac-12 three-peat and into the College Football Playoff.

But don't count him out. The former five-star recruit and his aggressive coach have never shied away from great expectations.

"I think it's very possible for a defensive player," Cristobal said of winning the Heisman. "The thing about K.T., he's a high achiever and he wants to be around guys who are into high achievement standards. He sees himself as limitless. We feel the same way."

*— Ryan Thorburn*

### TOP DEFENSIVE ENDS

| RK | NAME | CLASS | COLLEGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Kayvon Thibodeaux** | Jr. | Oregon |
| | Totally living up to recruiting hype: 12 sacks, 23.5 TFLs in 21 career games. | | |
| 2. | **DeMarvin Leal** | Jr. | Texas A&M |
| | 75 career tackles, 12.5 TFL in 23 games (17 starts). | | |
| 3. | **George Karlaftis** | Jr. | Purdue |
| | Freshman All-American in 2020 limited to 3 games in 2020 due to injury/COVID. | | |
| 4. | **Myjai Sanders** | Sr. | Cincinnati |
| | Part of salty Cincy defense; second in AAC with 7 sacks last season (10.5 TFLs). | | |
| 5. | **Drake Jackson** | Jr. | USC |
| | Plays on the edge and is versatile; has seven sacks and 17.5 TFLs in career. | | |
| 6. | **Aidan Hutchinson** | Sr. | Michigan |
| | Could move to OLB in new scheme after limited to three starts in 2020. | | |
| 7. | **Ali Gaye** | Sr. | LSU |
| | Big potential; made jump from JC ball to second-team All-SEC last season. | | |
| 8. | **Kingsley Enagbare** | Sr. | South Carolina |
| | Six sacks were second in SEC by a DL; was all-conference coaches choice. | | |
| 9. | **Zach VanValkenburg** | Sr. | Iowa |
| | Sixth-year player earned second-team All-Big Ten honors in 2020 (8.5 TFLs). | | |
| 10. | **Zach Harrison** | Jr. | Ohio State |
| | Has high first-round potential, no doubt; just hasn't quite put it all together yet. | | |
| 11. | **Tyreke Smith** | Sr. | Ohio State |
| | Has high first-round potential, no doubt; just hasn't quite put it all together yet. | | |
| 12. | **Myles Murphy** | So. | Clemson |
| | Burst onto scene as Freshman All-American; pairs with talented DE Xavier Thomas. | | |
| 13. | **Will McDonald** | Jr. | Iowa State |
| | Led Big 12 with 10.5 sacks and was fourth with 13.5 TFLs in 2020. | | |
| 14. | **Boye Mafe** | Sr. | Minnesota |
| | Freaky athlete, absolutely freaky. Has 8.5 sacks, 9.5 TFLs for career. | | |
| 15. | **Xavier Thomas** | Sr. | Clemson |
| | Still a bundle of potential after being star recruit and Freshman All-American. | | |
| 16. | **Cade Hall** | Sr. | San Jose State |
| | Had 10 sacks last season, was the Mountain West Defensive Player of the Year. | | |

### TOP DEFENSIVE TACKLES

| RK | NAME | CLASS | COLLEGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Jordan Davis** | Sr. | Georgia |
| | Big man earned second-team AFCA All-American honors in 2020. | | |
| 2. | **Haskell Garrett** | Sr. | Ohio State |
| | CBS All-American missed spring with foot injury; has played in 41 games. | | |
| 3. | **Bryan Bresee** | So. | Clemson |
| | Former five-star had four sacks last year, named ACC Defensive Rookie of Year. | | |
| 4. | **Perrion Winfrey** | Jr. | Oklahoma |
| | Top JC prospect from 2020 rules the middle of OU line, is eying 2020 first round. | | |
| 5. | **Jayden Peevy** | Sr. | Texas A&M |
| | Second-year starter has appeared in 47 career games for Aggies. | | |
| 6. | **Zacch Pickens** | Jr. | South Carolina |
| | SEC All-Freshman team in 2019 and has 51 tackles in 17 games. | | |
| 7. | **Christopher Hinton** | Jr. | Michigan |
| | Strong spring portends a 2021 coming-out party for former 5-star and future pro. | | |
| 8. | **D.J. Dale** | Jr. | Alabama |
| | Maybe this will end up being his teammate Phidarian Mathis. Bama is deep. | | |

# LINEBACKERS

## Step by step, Tide LB Harris checks all the boxes

CHRISTIAN HARRIS

Photo by James D. Smith via AP

It has been one step at a time for Christian Harris.

A high school safety, he was switched to linebacker once he arrived at Alabama.

OK, so that's a big step ... learning how to play a position he'd never played.

At 6-2, 232 pounds, he made an immediate impression on the coaching staff, and even more so when he was pressed into action that first year.

Once he made that step, he started every game for the Tide in 2019, finishing fourth on the team in tackles (63) along with 7.5 for loss, which was third on the team.

He excelled largely because of his athletic ability and football instincts. Result: *USA Today* and ESPN Freshman All-American.

His next step was to really learn the defense for his sophomore year; really understand the schemes and figure out how to play the position. He did exactly that and finished second on the team with 79 tackles, including 4.5 sacks and seven tackles for loss.

Result: Butkus Award semifinalist.

His next step, the way he figures it, would be to really to turn it up a notch in 2021 and become a leader.

"I had a lot of guys like Dylan (Moses) last year and guys from my freshman year show me what it is to be a leader on this team," Harris said of the veteran linebacker. "I'm trying to be more vocal and have a leadership role on the team."

By the end of spring workouts, he had become an undisputed leader for the Crimson Tide as they look to repeat as national champions this season.

For his first two seasons, Moses was there with him to help out with making play calls and getting the rest of the defense in the right spots. Harris has known Moses since they were kids in Baton Rouge, La., and they were teammates back in high school, too.

Having that anchor to lean on was huge. This season it's all on Harris. He's the one responsible for everything.

"I really am trying to take on a leadership role this year," Harris said. "I think I did a pretty good job with it last year."

His head coach thinks so, too. Nick Saban wants Harris to take that next step and be the quarterback of the defense.

"As a signal caller on defense ... you need to have a presence," Saban said. "He's starting to gain confidence in being able to do that. That's going to be important for us to grow."

His leadership role starts with being a mentor to younger players looking to make a splash on defense like he did as a freshman.

"The energy, the confidence level that everybody has out there, the communication, everything's been going pretty well right now," Harris said. "We've just got to make sure we keep going one day at a time and keep getting better."

Harris is in his third year in this defense with 25 starts to his credit in 26 games played.

A shoulder injury after the Arkansas game last season left him questionable for the SEC title game against Florida, and it was thought he might need surgery. Yet, he started the title game and even made the game's final play — a big sack of Kyle Trask to seal the Crimson Tide win.

Then in the national title game against Ohio State, Harris led the Crimson Tide with six tackles, along with an interception.

"Last year was last year. We are on to a new year," Harris said. "You enjoy it. It's a life-changing thing. It's not something you get to do every year. You have to embrace that opportunity and that moment. I didn't want to stay on it too much."

That's the sound of a leader with an approach that Saban appreciates.

With the way his career has gone, it's quite possible that one of his coming steps will be to step onto the stage as a first-round NFL Draft pick.

*— Edwin Stanton*

### TOP INSIDE LINEBACKERS

| RK | NAME | CLASS | COLLEGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Christian Harris** | Jr. | Alabama |
| | Butkus Award semifinalist is another body beautiful LB for the Tide. | | |
| 2. | **Mike Rose** | Sr. | Iowa State |
| | Big 12 Defensive Player of Year; led conference with 96 tackles, 5 INTs. | | |
| 3. | **James Skalski** | Sr. | Clemson |
| | Old-school LB hoping to be remembered for more than playoff ejections. | | |
| 4. | **Grant Morgan** | Sr. | Arkansas |
| | SEC leader and third nationally with 111 tackles, also had 7.5 TFL and pick-six. | | |
| 5. | **Micah McFadden** | Jr. | Indiana |
| | Led Hoosiers in tackles last two seasons, top Big Ten sack man in 2020 (6). | | |
| 6. | **Noah Sewell** | So. | Oregon |
| | Superstar alert: As frosh, had 45 tackles, 6.5 for loss, in 7-game season. | | |
| 7. | **Ventrell Miller** | Sr. | Florida |
| | Led Gators last season with 88 tackles in 2020; has first-round talent. | | |
| 8. | **Nakobe Dean** | Jr. | Georgia |
| | Butkus Award semifinalist had team-best 71 tackles in 10 games. | | |
| 9. | **Nate Landman** | Sr. | Colorado |
| | Just keeps making tackles: third in Pac-12 in tpg (10.6), fourth in TFLs (9). | | |
| 10. | **Carlton Martial** | Jr. | Troy |
| | Ex-walk-on tied for FBS lead with 113 tackles in 2020, has 315 for career. | | |
| 11. | **Jack Sanborn** | Sr. | Wisconsin |
| | Badgers' top tackler the past two seasons; four career INTs; high football IQ. | | |
| 12. | **Bumper Pool** | Sr. | Arkansas |
| | All-Name Team legend had four 10+ tackle games last year — 20 vs. Miss. State. | | |

### TOP OUTSIDE LINEBACKERS

| RK | NAME | CLASS | COLLEGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Will Anderson Jr.** | So. | Alabama |
| | "Terminator" was FWAA national Freshman of Year (7.5 sacks, 10.5 TFLs). | | |
| 2. | **Devin Lloyd** | Jr. | Utah |
| | All-Pac-12 and 2020 Butkus finalist; finished with 10 tackles for loss. | | |
| 3. | **Nik Bonitto** | Jr. | Oklahoma |
| | 18 starts in past two seasons, has 11.5 sacks and 17 career TFLs. | | |
| 4. | **Brenton Cox** | Jr. | Florida |
| | Ex-Georgia transfer one of those hybrid EDGE players with big pass-rush skills. | | |
| 5. | **Terrel Bernard** | Sr. | Baylor |
| | Was playing at an All-American level last season before injured in fifth game. | | |
| 6. | **Owen Pappoe** | Jr. | Auburn |
| | Third-year starter figures to be one of first LBs off the board in 2022 draft. | | |
| 7. | **Henry To'o To'o** | Jr. | Alabama |
| | Tennessee transfer (10 TFLs in 2020) still deciding on a new home in early May. | | |
| 8. | **Malcolm Rodriguez** | Sr. | Oklahoma State |
| | His 82 tackles ranked fourth in Big 12; 58 solo were tops among Power 5 LBs. | | |
| 9. | **Payton Wilson** | Sr. | NC State |
| | First-team All-ACC; led league with 108 tackles, added 11.5 TFLs. | | |
| 10. | **Merlin Robertson** | Sr. | Arizona State |
| | Hybrid DE/LB was Pac-12 Freshman of the Year in 2018 and keeps on motoring. | | |
| 11. | **DeMarvion Overshown** | Sr. | Texas |
| | Ex-safety is fast-rising draft prospect who can play all over, attack from anywhere. | | |
| 12. | **Baylon Spector** | Sr. | Clemson |
| | Second-team All-ACC; he and LB James Skalski form the Clemson "Bruise Brothers." | | |

# PLAYER RATINGS

# DEFENSIVE BACKS

## Kyle Hamilton is actually living up to his legend at Notre Dame

KYLE HAMILTON

Photo by Ric Tapia via AP

As crown jewel of Notre Dame's recruiting class of 2019, big things were expected of Kyle Hamilton.

Yet, as the 6-4, 220-pound athlete arrived on campus, veteran safeties Alohi Gilman and Jalen Elliott were already established in the lineup, presumably allowing the freshman to blend in by making incremental, periodic contributions.

But when the Irish opened their preseason camp in Culver, Ind., Hamilton blended in like a neon sign radiating "Super! Star!"

In his very first practice, Hamilton intercepted three passes. Practices were closed to the media at that point, and only third-hand accounts and bits of video were available.

But word was out, and his legend grew like a modern-day member of the Four Horsemen.

By the end of the first week, word was that he had intercepted a dozen passes. A week later, as the team returned to the Notre Dame campus, observers — including some players — said the number had grown closer to 20.

"As much as I've been trying to tamp down Kyle Hamilton for Heisman ... he's a really good player," Notre Dame coach Brian Kelly chuckled. "He shows up every day in some fashion. He has a unique skillset.

"At his size, he has a very unique suddenness and change of direction, which offers incredible range and length as a pass defender. I can't tell you that I've seen a player that can change direction and offers such incredible range on the back end."

Hamilton continued his meteoric ascent in the 2019 season.

In his first game at Notre Dame Stadium, he intercepted a pass and returned it for a touchdown. Used mainly in nickel situations with Gilman and Elliott, Hamilton still led the team in interceptions (four) and was named freshman All-American.

Last season, an ankle injury in the first game of 2020 prompted him to miss a game and slowed him through the season — ultimately requiring off-season surgery — but he still led the team in tackles and was imposing enough to be named an Football Writers Association of America first-team All-American.

"Kyle makes a difference," said Irish defensive coordinator Clark Lea, who has since become Vanderbilt head coach. "He makes an impact by just being on the field. His presence is felt. Teams plan around him, his length, his range. He fills up a lot of windows."

He heads into 2021 as one of the most feted and recognizable defensive players in college football. His third season with the Irish will likely be his last, projected as a probable top 10 draft pick.

Yet Hamilton still largely remains grounded. He considered himself mostly a basketball player at Marist School in Atlanta when he received a football scholarship offer as a sophomore.

"I didn't even realize I was that good at football to play in college," Hamilton said. "I was like, 'All right, let's give this thing a try.' So, I kept playing football and got more offers. I think I ultimately made the right decision."

Marcus Freeman, who replaced Lea as Notre Dame's defensive coordinator, didn't have the benefit of coaching Hamilton on the field in the spring, due to the safety's ankle surgery. But Freeman knows he'll have a special player patrolling the back end of his defense in the fall.

"You look at Kyle and can tell the skillset," Freeman said. "The length he brings to the back of our defense is second to none."

As Hamilton prepares for the next phase — a bombardment of questions about making himself available for the NFL Draft following his junior season — he has accepted the responsibilities that come with his star status.

"As a player, I've grown on a maturity level," Hamilton said. "Physically, mentally, being more commanding on the football field for everybody to look at."

Oh, everybody's watching. It's not easy taking your eyes off Kyle Hamilton. If you do, you just might miss his next great feat.

*— Tim Prister*

### TOP CORNERBACKS

| RK | NAME | CLASS | COLLEGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Derek Stingley Jr.** SEC all-conference pick in both seasons; should be first CB taken in '22 draft. | Jr. | LSU |
| 2. | **Ahmad Gardner** Six interceptions, two returned for scores in two years with stout UC defense. | Jr. | Cincinnati |
| 3. | **Kaair Elam** Tall and fast and makes plays on the ball. So, what's not to love? | Sr. | Florida |
| 4. | **Josh Jobe** Well-tested CB had 11 pass breakups last season; has 91 career tackles. | Jr. | Alabama |
| 5. | **Tiawan Mullen** First Hoosier CB to ever earn first-team All-America recognition. | So. | Indiana |
| 6. | **Sevyn Banks** Had key takeaways in opener vs. Nebraska, CFP semifinal vs. Clemson. | Sr. | Ohio State |
| 7. | **Tre'Vius Hodges-Tomlinson** Second in FBS with 13 pass breakups; still seeking first career INT. | Jr. | TCU |
| 8. | **Andrew Booth** Second-team All-ACC in first season as starter; 2 INTs and fumble return TD. | Jr. | Clemson |
| 9. | **Eli Ricks** Next in LSU pipeline: 4 INTs, two returned for TDs, in first college season. | So. | LSU |
| 10. | **Trent McDuffie** Rising star in Huskies defense has picks in each college season. | Jr. | Washington |
| 11. | **Kei'Trel Clark** Liberty transfer was a second-team All-ACC pick in first year with Cardinals. | Jr. | Louisville |
| 12. | **Shaun Jolly** Has 14 pass breakups past two seasons, anchors Mountaineers' back line. | Sr. | Appalachian State |

### TOP SAFETIES

| RK | NAME | CLASS | COLLEGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Kyle Hamilton** Busting with athleticism; was FWAA All-American in first season as starter. | Jr. | Notre Dame |
| 2. | **Brandon Joseph** Revelation in 2020: Six INTs in nine games to tie for FBS lead in 2020. | So. | Northwestern |
| 3. | **Bubba Bolden** Former USC Trojan is exciting playmaker who could still work on fundamentals. | Jr. | Miami |
| 4. | **Kolby Harvell-Peel** Has seven INTs and 24 pass breakups; withdraw from NFL Draft in January. | Jr. | Oklahoma State |
| 5. | **Nolan Turner** Another sixth-year senior for stacked Tigers' D; 190 career tackles and six INTs. | Sr. | Clemson |
| 6. | **Lewis Cine** Took over starting gig late in 2019 and locked into slot ever since. | Jr. | Georgia |
| 7. | **Jordan Battle** Entering second year as starter, had 66 tackles with a pick-six in 2020. | Jr. | Alabama |
| 8. | **Jalen Catalon** Led all FBS DBs and all defensive freshmen with 99 tackles last season. | So. | Arkansas |
| 9. | **Malachi Moore** SEC All-Freshman Team selection while playing "Star" role on Bama defense. | So. | Alabama |
| 10. | **Greg Eisworth** Big 12 Defensive Newcomer of Year in 2018; all-league three straight seasons. | Sr. | Iowa State |
| 11. | **Demani Richardson** Made 19 starts in first two seasons and is key part of dominant defense. | Jr. | Texas A&M |
| 12. | **Tykee Smith** Two-year starter at West Virginia only further bolsters Bulldogs' secondary. | Jr. | Georgia |

# PLAYER RATINGS

# ALL PURPOSE

## K-State's Vaughn Following Sproles' Template

Deuce Vaughn looks at his 2020 season and says he feels like he played pretty well for a freshman ... "with a lot of room for improvement, which is really exciting."

It might be exciting for him, but it's scary for opponents in 2021. To accomplish his lofty goals, Vaughn has been working to add muscle to his 5-5 frame.

### TOP KICKERS

| RK | NAME | CLASS | COLLEGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Cade York** — Is a stunning 10 of 12 from 50+, beat Florida with a 57-yard boot. | Jr. | LSU |
| 2. | **Gabe Brkic** — Has drilled 37 of 43 FGs for career, including 5 of 7 from 50+. | So. | Oklahoma |
| 3. | **Will Reichard** — Made every kick: 14 FGs (long of 52) and 84 PATs in 2020. | Jr. | Alabama |
| 4. | **Andre Szmyt** — Won Lou Groza Award as freshman in 2018; has 56 career FGs. | Jr. | Syracuse |
| 5. | **Jake Oldroyd** — Hit past five attempts from 50 and beyond; 13 of 13 FGs last year. | So. | BYU |
| 6. | **Nick Sciba** — Lou Groza semifinalist last two seasons with 57 career FGs. | Sr. | Wake Forest |
| 7. | **Anders Carlson** — Connected on 20 of 22 FGs in 2020; was second-team All-SEC. | Jr. | Auburn |
| 8. | **Cameron Dicker** — Strong-legged PK second in kickoff average in 2020, has 37 career FGs. | Jr. | Texas |

### TOP PUNTERS

| RK | NAME | CLASS | COLLEGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Jake Camarda** — All-SEC selection has averaged 46+ per punt in past two seasons. | Sr. | Georgia |
| 2. | **Lou Hedley** — Ray Guy finalist was second in nation in punting average (47.2) in 2020. | Sr. | Miami |
| 3. | **Ryan Stonehouse** — Fifth year as Rams' punter; 46.8 career average tops in FBS since 2000. | Sr. | Colorado State |
| 4. | **Michael Turk** — Has a 46.2-yard average on 81 career punts. | Jr. | Arizona State |
| 5. | **Tory Taylor** — Freshman All-American, top punter in Big Ten last season (44.1). | So | Iowa |
| 6. | **Austin McNamara** — Set Big 12 record with 87-yard punt against West Virginia. | Jr. | Texas Tech |
| 7. | **Lucas Dean** — Sixth nationally with a 4.60-yard average last season. | Jr. | UTSA |
| 8. | **John Haggerty III** — Aussie averaging 45.8 yards per punt in career. | Sr. | Western Kentucky |

### TOP ALL PURPOSE

| RK | NAME | CLASS | COLLEGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Deuce Vaughn** — Whether running, receiving or dabbling in the return game, anyone more fun? | So. | Kansas State |
| 2. | **Marcus Jones** — A 2020 All-American as a punt returner; has All-AAC potential as a cornerback. | Jr. | Houston |
| 3. | **Wan'Dale Robinson** — Kentucky will use ex-Nebraska playmaker mostly in slot, but every which way. | Jr. | Kentucky |
| 4. | **Britain Covey** — Two-time first-team All-Pac-12 as returner; led team in receiving yards 3 times. | Sr. | Utah |
| 5. | **Aron Cruickshank** — Slippery return man was 2020 Big Ten Specialist of Year; also made 37 catches. | Jr. | Rutgers |
| 6. | **Justin Hall** — Career: 2,772 receiving yards, 610 rushing yards, 609 return yards. | Sr. | Ball State |
| 7. | **Calvin Turner** — Scored 11 TDs in 2020, lined up as RB/WR/wildcat QB/punt and kick returner. | Sr. | Hawaii |
| 8. | **Savon Scarver** — Was a 2018 first-team All-American; has scored six times on kick returns. | Sr. | Utah State |

DEUCE VAUGHN

Photo by AP Photo/Charlie Riedel

"I played around 168 or 169," he said in the spring. "Today I weighed in at 175. I feel the best I've ever felt in my life. I haven't lost any speed. If anything, I feel more explosive."

A mighty mite to be sure.

Vaughn established the Kansas State freshman record for rushing yards in a season (642), breaking a school record set not by College Football Hall of Famer Darren Sproles, but by Leon Patton, who gained 609 yards in 2006.

Sproles, it might be noted, was listed as 5-7, 170 as a K-State freshman in 2001. He gained just 210 yards as a true freshman on his way to a school record 4,979 yards, nearly 2,000 yards ahead of second place on the Wildcat career list. He owns three of the top five seasons in K-State history, including the top spot with 1,986 as a junior.

By the time he got to the precise measurement of the NFL combine in 2005, he was listed as 5-6, 187. He played most of his remarkable 14-year NFL career at 5-7, 190.

Vaughn is thoroughly aware of the importance of adding strength and even a little bulk.

"Adding weight to make sure my body is in the best shape is going to be big," Vaughn said. "When you get to that seven-game stretch without a bye, you have to make sure you're playing to the best of your abilities and your body is still in the best shape."

Of course, what made Sproles valuable was his versatility as a running back, receiver, and punt and kick returner. That's also a key part of Vaughn's game.

Vaughn holds school freshman records in all-purpose yards for a running back (1,221). He caught 25 passes for 434 yards and two touchdowns, and he returned seven kickoffs for 145 yards.

He was named the True Freshman of the Year by 247Sports, a Freshman All-American by The Athletic and the Big 12 Offensive Freshman of the Year by the league's coaches. As a second-team All-Big 12 selection, he was the first Wildcat true freshman in the Big 12 era (since 1996) to earn first- or second-team All-Big 12 honors on offense.

"Deuce is a special, special player," Kansas State coach Chris Klieman said succinctly.

Vaughn said having spring workouts this year — something he didn't have last year — will help him build toward an even better sophomore year.

"Keep making strides in the mental game," he said, "getting my pre-snap stuff down, especially running routes out of the backfield. And then working on my second- and third-level moves to turn 15- and 20-yard gains into 70-yard gains."

Kansas State running backs coach Brian Anderson will be looking to build on Vaughn's strengths and shore up his weaknesses, but he's excited about the raw tools.

Blocking is another challenge.

"Obviously, protection is a concern because of his size," Anderson said. "He knows where to go. He knows what to do. It's just a matter of getting his technique down.

"Then it's seeing the big picture, seeing how the defense is aligned and then making those off-track runs, where it's designed to go this way but you can cut the ball back. He's done that this spring."

Plenty of people were wrong on Vaughn coming out of high school, like they were with Sproles. Not big enough to take the punishment of Division I football at the highest level?

Sproles has 4,979 answers for those who doubted him, and Vaughn will be looking to add a few answers of his own.

*— David Smale*

# UNIT RANKINGS

Which teams have the best QB/RB combinations? These 10:

## TOP 10 BACKFIELD

### 1. GEORGIA

The Bulldogs were a different team late last season with JT Daniels at quarterback, who is already being hailed as the next Joe Burrow/Mac Jones of the SEC. The expectations somehow rose further when he threw for 324 yards and three touchdowns during the spring game. The Bulldogs also have a ridiculous parade of running backs, led by Zamir White.

### 2. OKLAHOMA

Perhaps you've heard of the Heisman frontrunner: Quarterback Spencer Rattler threw for 3,031 yards and 28 touchdowns as a redshirt freshman last season. Meanwhile, it's welcome back for Kennedy Brooks, who opted out of 2020 but logged 1,000-yard seasons as a freshman and sophomore. And then there's Tennessee transfer Eric Gray, who had 1,311 yards rushing and another 369 receiving (11 total TDs) in his two seasons in Knoxville.

### 3. IOWA STATE

The Cyclones return the nation's leading rusher in Breece Hall (1,572 yards, 21 touchdowns) and a quarterback closing in on 10,000 career yards of total offense in Brock Purdy. Purdy threw for 2,750 yards and 19 TDs last season and Hall brought in 23 passes for 180 yards and two more TDs.

### 4. ALABAMA

No Mac Jones or Najee Harris, but we're talking about the Crimson Tide, which can reload unlike any program in the nation. Bryce Young, who some rated as the nation's best prospect two years ago, is ready to take over and at running back, Alabama is as deep as the Mariana Trench.

### 5. OLE MISS

Year 2 of the Lane Kiffin era should result in only more offense since everyone now knows what to expect. Matt Corral threw for 3,337 yards and 29 touchdowns in 10 games, and the Rebels have a more-than-nice 1-2 backfield tandem with Jerrion Ealy (147 carries for 745 yards and eight touchdowns) and Snoop Conner (93 carries for 447, and eight TDs).

### 6. CLEMSON

We know, Trevor Lawrence really was the first pick in the NFL Draft, and four-year stud Travis Etienne truly was a first-rounder, too. But these are the Clemson-dang-Tigers, and the backfield talent rolls on with monster-armed D.J. Uiagalelei at quarterback and — trust us here — multiple future NFL running backs.

### 7. OHIO STATE

Justin Fields turned pro. Now what? C.J. Stroud and Jack Miller are chomping at the bit to quarterback this team, and keep an eye on incoming freshman Kyle McCord. Stroud figures to be the man to beat. Yes, Trey Sermon is gone. But the Buckeyes' running back cup still runneth way over. Master Teague III is the heir. TreVeyon Henderson was the No. 1 prep back in the nation. How many teams wouldn't trade their backfield for this one?

### 8. AUBURN

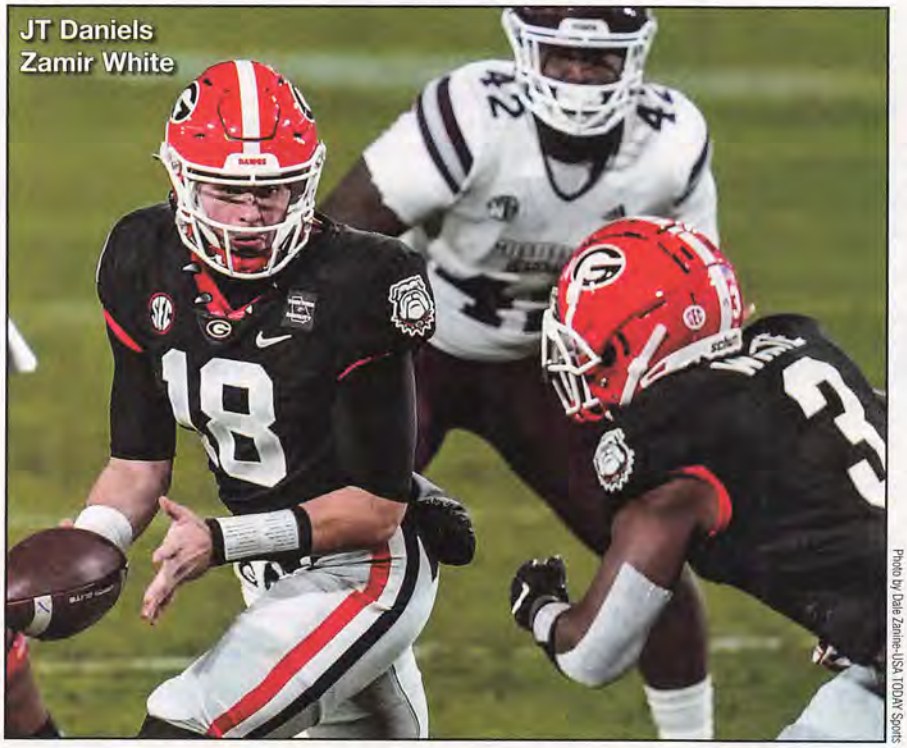
We understand if everyone is not completely sold on Tigers quarterback Bo Nix, who will have his third offensive coordinator in as many years, not to mention a new head coach, but Auburn could sneak up on people. Mostly, though, we are crushing on running back Tank Bigsby.

### 9. MINNESOTA

The Gophers deserve this ranking based on just having running back Mohamed Ibrahim. Is there a better running back in the nation? It's a small list. QB Tanner Morgan is a sage hand who is entering his third season as the Golden Gophers starter. His numbers fell off a bit from 2019, but he's a dangerous dual threat who makes the offense go in Dinkytown.

### 10. MIAMI

The Hurricanes have flaws on their roster, but the backfield isn't one of them other than getting D'Eriq King's gimpy knee fully up to speed. He and Cam'Ron Harris give Miami a supremely formidable backfield combination. King's plays outside the pocket make him such a game-changer, and if he wasn't injured in the bowl game, they'd be much higher on this list.



JT Daniels
Zamir White

Photo by Dale Zanine-USA TODAY Sports

## TOP 10 RECEIVERS

### 1. OHIO STATE

Stop us if you've heard this before: The talent in this room is off the charts. Chris Olave's return was an unexpected surprise and he makes this an elite unit. And don't forget about Garrett Wilson, who might be the top pro project on the team. Gee Scott Jr. is a rising talent. Jaxon Smith-Njigba and Julian Fleming are waiting for their turn. Oh, and Jeremy Ruckert is one of the top tight ends in the nation.

### 2. CLEMSON

Justyn Ross is the No. 1 target in the position group, but we also like the Tigers' No. 2 target, and their No. 3 and No. 4 and No. 5 ... OK, you get the point. What's going to come to life over the course of the season is just how many very, very good receivers Clemson has. Frank Ladson Jr. Joseph Ngata. E.J. Williams. Ajou Ajou could be the breakout performer of 2021. We don't even have space to talk about the early enrolled freshmen.

## 3. OKLAHOMA

Coach Lincoln Riley wants better play out of his receivers — doesn't he always? — but we kind of like them just the way they are. Marvin Mims had 37 catches for 610 yards and a Big 12 freshman-record nine TDs last season, and Theo Wease was pretty good. Two other five-star wideouts — Jadon Haselwood and Mario Williams — are hoping for their turn. The line got longer in late April when Arkansas transfer Mike Woods announced he was Norman-bound. But, wait, there's more! OU's tight end/H-back corps caught 65 passes for 918 yards and 10 TDs in 2020.

## 4. ALABAMA

Four first-round picks over the last two years should have decimated the Crimson Tide receiving corps. It did not. John Metchie III caught 55 passes for 916 yards and six touchdowns last season, and Jameson Williams transferred in from Ohio State. And they're joined by the stellar group of freshman receivers that includes Agiye Hall, Ja'Corey Brooks, Christian Leary and Jo Jo Earle.

## 5. USC

Few programs can lose talents the caliber of Amon-Ra St. Brown and Tyler Vaughns yet continue to be one of the standard-bearers for the position. That's exactly what USC is poised to do. Drake London's combination of size, speed and length make him a constant big-play threat, and bringing in Colorado transfer K.D. Nixon was a sneaky good addition as he provides QB Kedon Slovis with a new playmaker in space.

## 6. LSU

The Tigers look good on paper, at least. Kayshon Boutte showed what kind of potential he has with 527 receiving yards on 27 catches and four touchdowns over the final three games of his freshman season. LSU also returns Jaray Jenkins and Jontre Kirklin, plus added a top-notch group of prospects.

## 7. MIAMI

Miami already had Mike Harley (57 catches, 799 yards, 7 TDs last season), and then portal-miner Manny Diaz unearthed Charleston Rambo from Oklahoma. Having D'Eriq King throwing them the ball will be a continuous fireworks show in South Florida this season.

## 8. GEORGIA

The Bulldogs lost George Pickens for the season with a torn ACL, but they are deep, deep, deep. It starts with Kearis Jackson, and then Dominick Blaylock is back after missing the 2020 season due to his second ACL injury. Basically, this is a strong rotation with numerous options.

## 9. IOWA STATE

Yep. We're counting tight ends here. Charlie Kolar has All-America credentials (92 catches, 1,266 yards, 14 TDs in the last two seasons). Wide receiver Xavier Hutchinson's impact last season was huge, and there's also Tarique Milton.

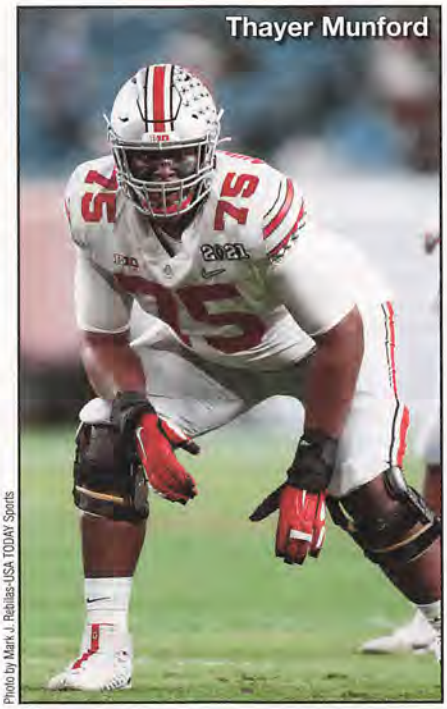

Thayer Munford

Photo by Mark J. Rebilas-USA TODAY Sports

## 10. PENN STATE

The return of Jahan Dotson is huge. He will be one of the Big Ten's best … and QB Sean Clifford's best buddy. The riches continue with Daniel George, Parker Washington and KeAndre Lambert-Smith. Washington was the best freshman wideout in the Big Ten last year. Huzza.

# TOP 10 OFFENSIVE LINE

## 1. OHIO STATE

Wyatt Davis and Josh Myers turned pro, but it was a pleasant surprise when tackle Thayer Munford opted to return. He will team with tackle Nick Petit-Frere to give the Buckeyes a pair of standout tackles who can bully foes. Want more? Center/guard Harry Miller, Matthew Jones and Paris Johnson are other potential anchors up front for a monster line.

## 2. BOSTON COLLEGE

Zion Johnson has the look of a first-round pick next year, and a few of his linemates figure to join him later in the draft. All five starters return for the Eagles, including All-ACC center Alec Lindstrom, for a unit that can still maul in the grand BC tradition, but what they really want to do this season is protect the franchise — QB Phil Jurkovec.

## 3. IOWA STATE

The Cyclones return all five starters and more from last year's Big 12 runner-up. Center Colin Newell (first team) and RG Derek Schweiger (second) made All-Big 12 last season, and LG Darrell Simmons probably could have.

## 4. WISCONSIN

Blockers are built in Madison. Logan Bruss is a bellwether who is ticketed for the NFL. Logan Brown is a future star who, after spring, was still trying to find a way to shoehorn his 305 pounds into the starting lineup. That's how good the projected starting five is — they can even block their own.

## 5. VIRGINIA TECH

The Hokies put Christian Darrisaw into the first round of this year's NFL draft. Lecitus Smith could be next year's first-round pick, and center Brock Hoffman is also a seasoned top-tier offensive lineman. Great offensive line play has been the foremost virtue of the program under Justin Fuente.

## 6. LSU

Led by the likes of Austin Deculus, Ed Ingram and Dare Rosenthal, the Tigers return all five starters, which should help them improve their chemistry in comparison to the Joe Moore Award season of 2019. LSU will be much better up front, with one of the keys being Liam Shanahan, a Harvard grad transfer who now has an SEC season under his belt at center.

## 7. OKLAHOMA

The Sooners return three starters up front – LT Erik Swenson, LG Marquis Hayes and RG Tyrese Robinson – and added former five-star LT Wanya Morris from Tennessee. Morris is an instant upgrade, and Swenson probably shifts to RT. Sophomore Andrew Raym replaces Creed Humphrey at center and has loads of potential.

## 8. GEORGIA

Lots of talent here, and the Bulldogs just have to make it fit. Jamaree Salyer is the returning left tackle, but he might slide inside. Xavier Truss started in the Peach Bowl and the Bulldogs also have prize prospects Broderick Jones and Amarius Mims. Warren McClendon was a Freshman All-American at right tackle.

## 9. ALABAMA

If Landon Dickerson and Alex Leatherwood were the heart and soul of the Crimson Tide offensive line, Deonte Brown was the meat. But all three are gone to the NFL. Evan Neal will switch from right tackle to left, and he will be an early favorite for the Outland Trophy. Prized newcomers opened eyes in the spring.

## 10. OREGON

Oregon has long boasted top-notch offensive lines, and Mario Cristobal isn't going to let that tradition slide. All five starters return, with Alex Forsyth, Malaesala Aumavae-Laulu and T.J. Bass veteran anchors.

# UNIT RANKINGS

## TOP 10 DEFENSIVE LINE

### 1. CLEMSON

Xavier Thomas and Tyler Davis coming back for yet another year in coordinator Brent Venables' defense? Grown men Bryan Breese and Myles Murphy are only sophomores? None of this seems fair ... but Clemson isn't here to be fair. It's here to try to recreate that fire-breathing defensive line that cleared passage to the 2018 national title.

### 2. ALABAMA

This is no exaggeration: As most programs struggle to field five quality defensive linemen, Alabama could go five deep — seriously. With the help of LaBryan Ray, who missed most of last season with a foot injury, the Crimson Tide aims to be more physical in the trenches, and will be with the likes of DJ Dale, Justin Eboigbe, Byron Young, Phidarian Mathis, Jamil Burroughs ... we could go on. Almost forgot: The player to watch is Tim Smith.

### 3. OHIO STATE

Tackle Tommy Togiai left for the NFL. No shock. But his loss is offset by the return of tackle Haskell Garrett, an active force. Fellow tackle Taron Vincent is a load who sits in the hole. End Tyreke Smith opted to return and will bookend with Zach Harrison. Freshman end Jack Sawyer has everyone excited. Is he the next Joey Bosa? Shoot, aren't they all?

### 4. OKLAHOMA

The Sooners have more flexibility and depth across its three-down front than some conferences. DE Isaiah Thomas (13 TFLs, team-leading 8.5 sacks) can slide inside to tackle. DL Jalen Redmond (11 TFLs, team-leading 6.5 sacks in 2019) opted out, but added mass to play noseguard. NG Perrion Winfrey is poised for a huge year after transferring from JC last season. And DE/LB Nik Bonitto (eight sacks) has All-America skills.

### 5. GEORGIA

All-star nose tackle Jordan Davis is back, with Travon Walker the best pass rusher on the end. DeVonte Wyatt's return in the interior solidified the unit. The Bulldogs have good depth as well and have led the nation in rushing defense for two years running. In the past decade, only the Alabama defense of 2016 allowed fewer than the 72.3-yard average (just 2.39 per carry) teams mustered against the 2020 Dawgs.

### 6. LSU

The question isn't if the defensive line has improved, it's how much? All four starters return. The strength of the unit are ends Ali Gaye and Andre Anthony as pass rushers. Sophomore BJ Ojulari is right behind them. Glen Logan and Neil Farrell will be challenged in the interior by Maason Smith and Jaquelin Roy, who appear poised to force their way onto the field. To challenge for the SEC West title, LSU has to get better against the run and this is where it will start.

### 7. OREGON

Building around Kayvon Thibodeaux, perhaps the best pass-rusher in the nation, Oregon boasts a wealth of young talent primed to break out in 2021. Tackles Brandon Dorlus, Keyon Ware-Hudson and Kristian Williams all have shown glimpses of being ready to emerge as the Ducks' premier gap-stoppers to fill Jordon Scott's void up front.

### 8. TEXAS A&M

Jimbo Fisher has done a major upgrade on the overall line since his arrival, with this year's unit led by DeMarvin Leal. The Aggies also boast defensive tackle Jayden Peevy and end Tyree Johnson.

### 9. ARIZONA STATE

The West may not have a more dangerous duo coming off the edge than defensive end Tyler Johnson and hybrid end/outside linebacker Merlin Robertson. Robertson's transition to more of a pass-rushing role is going to suit the attacking nature of the Devils' D.

Will Anderson Jr.

Photo by Mark J. Rebilas-USA TODAY Sports

### 10. VIRGINIA TECH

The Hokies bring back TyJuan Garrett, Amare Barno and Jordan Williams, three players on our preseason All-ACC teams. That's particularly impressive when you consider the way Clemson sucks up all the oxygen at the position.

## TOP 10 LINEBACKERS

### 1. ALABAMA

We had already anointed Alabama as having the most impressive group of linebackers in the whole USA, and then the Tide went over the salary cap (we're kidding!) to bring in an established SEC star — Tennessee transfer Henry To'o To'o. And here we were thinking that just having two *Lindy's* preseason All-Americans (Christian Harris and Will Anderson Jr.), along with 2020 second-team All-SEC Chris Allen, would be plenty. This may explain why Nick Saban has seven national championship rings.

### 2. GEORGIA

Junior Nakobe Dean is the key man in the middle, the team's leading tackler with 71 in 10 games last season. Adam Anderson, who had 6.5 sacks, is still Georgia's best pass-rusher, but is looking to be an every-down linebacker this season. Nolan Smith, one of the SEC's best off the edge, is poised for a big season.

### 3. AUBURN

Even without K.J. Britt, the Tigers figure to be better. Auburn is led by Owen Pappoe, who had 93 tackles, including six for a loss and four sacks, last season. Outside linebacker Zakoby McClain led the SEC with 113 tackles, including 5.5 for a loss and three sacks.

### 4. OREGON

Noah Sewell's outstanding 2020 season — Pac-12 Freshman Defensive Player of the Year — brings us to this stacked 2021 unit. Sewell leads a group that returns promising pass-rusher Mase Funa and Isaac Slade-Matautia. Now consider that Sewell wasn't even the Ducks' top-rated linebacker recruit in 2020. That would have been five-star Justin Flowe, limited to one game last season due to injury but on track to be healthy for 2021.

### 5. CLEMSON

Clemson's "Bruise Brothers" have one final act in 2021 after James Skalski decided to return for a sixth season to pair with Baylon Spector. With 210 tackles in 56 career games, Skalski is the heart of this Tigers' defense.

### 6. IOWA STATE

The Cyclones return all three starters — and

they're good. Mike Rose (96 tackles, 10.5 TFLs, 5 INTs) was the Big 12 Defensive Player of the Year and earned All-America honors. Jake Hummell (77 stops, 4.5 TFLs) is as steady as they come. O'Rien Vance (68 tackles, 6 TFLs) puts himself in the right place. And all three are seniors.

## 7. OKLAHOMA STATE

Senior Malcolm Rodriguez came back for a "super senior" season after leading the Cowboys in tackles each of the last two seasons. His dedication, enthusiasm and attention are unrivaled after the way he switched from safety early in his career. Devin Harper gives the Cowboys an athletic replacement for Amen Ogbongbemiga.

## 8. UTAH

Devin Lloyd, one of the most versatile defenders in the Pac-12, leads Utah's linebacker group, which is a typical strength of Kyle Whittingham's teams. Nephi Sewell, the older brother of Oregon's Noah Sewell, is also one of the best in the conference.

## 9. OKLAHOMA

Senior DaShaun White will be a three-year starter in the middle — if he can hold off wildly athletic David Ugwoegbu, who also switches out at weakside with Brian Asamoah, another incredible athlete who makes plays all over the field.

## 10. WASHINGTON

The return of outside linebacker Ryan Bowman adds a pass-rush threat to a unit that has been consistently solid against the run for several years running. Edefuan Ulofoshio and Jackson Sirmon are count-on-me teammates.

# TOP 10 DEFENSIVE BACKS

## 1. LSU

Derek Stingley Jr. and Elias Ricks figure to be the best pair of starting cornerbacks in college football. Stingley wasn't 100 percent in 2020, while Ricks picked off four passes as a true freshman. At safety, LSU will need true freshman Sage Ryan to grow up quickly after dual-sport standout Maurice Hampton decided to focus solely on baseball.

## 2. ALABAMA

The Crimson Tide returns everyone in the secondary minus first-round cornerback Patrick Surtain II. Cornerback Josh Jobe will step into a larger role in terms of leadership after breaking up 11 passes last season, while Jalyn Armour-Davis tries to hold off top prospect Ga'Quincy "Kool-Aid" McKinstry at the other corner. The Tide is flush with safety-types (Jordan Battle, Brian Branch, Malachi Moore, DeMarcco Hellams) who could all be elite at some point.

## 3. OHIO STATE

Yes, CB Shaun Wade will be missed after he turned pro. But don't weep for OSU, which returns cornerbacks Sevyn Banks, Tyreke Johnson, Cameron Martinez and Cameron Brown, along with Josh Proctor, Marcus Hooker and Lathan Ransom at safety. This place is dubbed "DB U" for a reason, although LSU and Alabama are also filing for a copyright.

## 4. CLEMSON

Cornerback Andrew Booth Jr. gives the Tigers a lot of upside, and safety Nolan Turner is coming back for his sixth season, although you might remember him getting torched by Ohio State in last season's College Football Playoff. That's part of the equation here, as the entire starting secondary is back with fire in its belly ... and the talent to eliminate many of those big plays that went the wrong way in 2020.

## 5. TEXAS A&M

The Aggies have a lot of experience on the back end, especially with safeties Leon O'Neal Jr. and Demani Richardson — also known as big hitters — and senior reserve Keldrick Carper. At corner, Myles Jones is coming off his best season yet, while Jaylon Jones held his own as a freshman last season. Elijah Blades is back after opting out and flirting with entering the NFL Draft.

## 6. CINCINNATI

The Bearcats secondary remains stacked with ballhawk corners Ahmad "Sauce" Gardner, Coby Bryant and Arquon Bush back from last year's top 10 defense. Plus safeties Bryan Cook and Ja'Von Hicks played a lot in reserve (Cook had been a starter in 2019) and they will pick up just fine for James Wiggins and Darrick Forrest, who were NFL Draft picks.

## 7. OKLAHOMA

The Sooners' defensive backs have been under heavy criticism for a decade or so, but this group shook off that stigma with 16 interceptions last year (third in the nation) and sent two DBs into the draft for the first time in years. Their replacements (CB D.J. Graham, nickel Billy Bowman or Jeremiah Criddell) have very high upsides, too. Junior college All-American Justin Harrington and Tennessee transfer Key Lawrence just need a position and could be stars.

## 8. MICHIGAN

This unit has teeth. Daxton Hill is a top safety who someday will be cashing NFL paychecks, while S Brad Hawkins is savvy and a hitter. Cornerback Gemon Green made great strides in 2020. Ditto fellow corner Vincent Gray.

## 9. OKLAHOMA STATE

Tre Sterling is one of the Big 12's best overall defensive backs but might be the second-best on his team. Kolby Harvell-Peel, who in 2019 had nine takeaways to go with 71 tackles, looked more human in 2020, but was still stellar.

## 10. IOWA STATE

Greg Eisworth, the first player in ISU history to earn all-conference three times, came back for his "super senior" season. As a freshman last year, Isheem Young stood out (50 tackles, 1 INT, 3 forced fumbles). Both cornerbacks — Datrone Young and Anthony Johnson — are back.

Derek Stingley Jr.

Photo by Jay Biggerstaff-USA TODAY Sports

By 247Sports

## 1. Alabama

For the ninth time in 11 years, Alabama signed the 247Sports Composite's No. 1 recruiting class. This was Nick Saban and company's finest work yet on the trail, finishing with the highest-scoring class in 247Sports history (327.91), eclipsing the Florida 2010 haul (324.62). The timing of this group is perfect as Saban and his staff aim to reload from a 2017 class that leaves Tuscaloosa as two-time national champs with several first-round draft choices and a handful of Heisman Trophy finalists, including this past year's winner, DeVonta Smith.

The big need for Alabama this cycle was landing some potential instant impact guys on the offensive line. To solve that, the Crimson Tide went out and signed the top two offensive tackles in five-stars **JC Latham** and **Tommy Brockermeyer**. The nation's No. 2 offensive guard **Terrence Ferguson** and No. 1 center **James Brockermeyer** were pivotal signees as well, as the Crimson Tide maintain the standard they've built on the offensive front. The Brockermeyer brothers are the sons of Blake Brockermeyer, a former All-American at Texas and first-round draft choice who had a long career in the NFL.

No program recruited the state of Florida better than Alabama, who landed the state's top three receivers in five-star **Jacorey Brooks,** along with speedsters **Agiye Hall** and **Christian Leary**. It also grabbed the state's top two edge rushers (five-star **Dallas Turner** and **Keanu Koht**, a late LSU flip) and the No. 3 safety **Terrion Arnold**, who will also play basketball in Tuscaloosa.

Three other five-stars put pen to paper, including No. 1 cornerback **Ga'Quincey McKinstry**, the No. 1 in-state player who will also play basketball; defensive tackle **Damon Payne** and running back **Camar Wheaton**. Of the 27 players that signed, 24 are billed four-star or better.

## 2. Ohio State

Over half of this Buckeyes class ranked in the Top100 as the Big Ten powerhouse finished with the No. 2 class for the third time in the last five recruiting cycles. The jewel of the class is defensive end **Jack Sawyer**, who was also the first to commit. The top player from Ohio will remind fans of the Bosa brothers coming off the edge.

In a five-star frenzy, Ryan Day and his staff landed the No. 1 receiver **Emeka Egbuka** from Washington state, and the No. 1 running back in **TreVeyon Henderson** from Virginia. The No. 1 offensive guard — and perhaps top offensive lineman overall — in **Donovan Jackson** signed from the Lone Star State, and the No. 3 pro-style passer, **Kyle McCord**, is already on campus and competing to replace Justin Fields.

Other major gets included Top247 defensive tackle **Mike Hall**; the nation's No. 2 all-purpose back **Evan Pryor** who, like Henderson, can really fly; the nation's No. 5 inside linebacker **Reid Carrico** and two more very talented receivers in **Marvin Harrison Jr.** (son of the Hall of Fame receiver) and **Jayden Ballard**. Ballard becomes perhaps the fastest player in the Buckeyes exceptionally strong position room.

This is a 21-player class that keeps Ohio State in contention for years to come.

## 3. LSU

A third-straight top-five class for the Tigers as Ed Orgeron rises to No. 3 with this 23-player haul, highlighted by home cooking.

The Tigers secured signatures from the top two players in the state. They grabbed five-star defensive tackle **Maason Smith**, holding off Georgia, and five-star safety **Sage Ryan**, beating Alabama late. They are two jewels of a class that should provide instant help to a defense that was young and took some lumps in 2020. Six of the state's top eight are headed to Baton Rouge, including Top 100 receivers **Chris Hilton** and **Brian Thomas Jr.**, defensive end **Savion Jones** and athlete **Malik Nabers**, who could be a difference-maker at wideout or in the secondary.

This was a strong receiver class for the Tigers as another consensus Top 100 receiver in **Deion Smith** is on the way. Nobody is happier about that than Top 247 quarterback Garrett Nussmeier, who is already on campus and impressing. LSU hit on a pair of prolific running backs in **Armoni Goodwin** and **Corey Kiner**, and look for cornerback **Damarius McGhee** to blossom into one of the top cover guys in the SEC.

This 23-player class should particularly keep the scoreboard lighting up in Death Valley.

## 4. Georgia

For the first time in the Kirby Smart era, the Bulldogs didn't finish in the top three of the 247Sports Composite standings, but nobody is feeling sorry for the guys in Athens. They go out and sing a 20-player class highlighted by four five-stars.

Quarterback **Brock Vandagriff** has all the makings of a championship signal-caller and may push JT Daniels in year one. Offensive tackle **Amarius Mims** has as much upside as anyone at the position, and linebackers **Smael Mondon** and **Xavian Sorey** are athletic. They can rush the passer and they can play in space.

Other big-time gets for Georgia include defensive tackle **Tyrion Ingram-Dawkins**, who figures to be one of the SEC's best in the middle trenches, and offensive guard **Dylan Fairchild**, a state wrestling champ. The Bulldogs are going to need the No. 4 cornerback in the class, **Nyland Green**, to step up early considering what they lost in the draft, and **Brock Bowers** comes in as one of the more dynamic tight ends in the country.

Georgia has been knocking on the door of winning a national championship under Smart's watch and this class keeps them in the conversation.

## 5. Clemson

A very talented 19-player class is headed to play for the ACC powerhouse, highlighted by five-stars **Will Shipley** (APB), **Tristan Leigh** (OT) and **Barrett Carter** (S/LB). When looking at average ranking per commit, the Tigers signed the No. 3 class in the country, trailing just the Crimson Tide and Buckeyes.

Shipley is drawing comparisons to Christian McCaffrey with his phenomenal testing numbers. The proof is in his athleticism and his film, where he is electric out of the backfield and in the passing game. Leigh was a heavily coveted player at his position who could play early as Clemson aims to replace Jackson Carman, another former five-star. Defensive coordinator Brent Venables plans to play Carter in a similar role to Isaiah Simmons.

In addition to Carter, Clemson recruited well on the defensive side as instinctive, hard-hitting linebacker **Jeremiah Trotter Jr.** (son of a former two-time All-Pro) and speedy cornerback **Nathaniel Wiggins** (flipped from LSU late) are in the boat. The Tigers also have a pair of defensive ends who maintain the school's standard at that position in **Zaire Patterson** and **Cade Denoff**. Watch four-star safety **Andrew Mukuba** become one of the ACC's best.

Tight end **Jake Briningstool** is already turning heads as an early enrollee.

## 6. Oregon

For a third-straight year, Oregon has the No. 1 class in the Pac 12. This was also the program's second time in the Composite's Top 10 in the last three cycles, eclipsing the 2019 class by one spot at No. 6.

Naturally, Mario Cristobal and the Ducks are recruiting the offensive line as well as anybody. They hit on four highly-touted players in offensive tackles **Kingsley Suamataia**, **Bram Walden** and **Jonah Miller,** along with the country's No. 2 center **Jackson Light**. Suamataia could quickly remind folks of Penei Sewell.

Second-year offensive coordinator Joe Moorhead has to be giddy about the big match-up problems that Oregon signed at receiver and tight end. **Troy Franklin**, **Isaiah Brevard** and **Dont'e Thornton** can take the top off any defense and bring major size to the receiver room. **Terrance Ferguson** and **Moliki Matavao** are those 6-5, downfield pass-catching tight ends that have the makings of being a big problem for the opposition as well.

Prolific quarterback **Ty Thompson** comes from Arizona as a state champion. Big pickups on defense include one of the West's top defensive linemen, **Keanu Williams**, and fast cornerback **Avante Dickerson**. Linebacker **Jabril McNeill** was

also a coup for the Ducks out of North Carolina. The sleeper of the class, perhaps the sleeper of the Pac 12, is cornerback **Darren Barkins**.

## 7. Texas A&M

A third-straight Top 10 class for Jimbo Fisher and his staff as the Aggies get another step closer to the College Football Playoff with this 23-player haul.

The No. 1 returning defense in the SEC adds even more talent, led by five-star defensive tackle **Shemar Turner** and equally coveted defensive end **Tunmise Adeleye**. **Marcus Burris**, **Elijah Jeudy** and **Jahzion Harris** are three more four-stars that will keep the Aggies very talented at the point of attack. Swiping four-star safety **Jardin Gilbert** out of Louisiana was a big win, as well as taking **Tyreek Chappell** out of Pennsylvania.

This class wasn't all about defense though. **Eli Stowers** is as athletic as they come at the quarterback position. Top247 receiver **Shadrach Banks** had a big senior season, and the country's No. 4 running back **LJ Johnson** chose Texas A&M late over recruiting rival Texas. As Texas A&M says goodbye to one of the best offensive lines in the country, they bring in two of the state's best in offensive guard **Bryce Foster** and offensive tackle **Reuben Fatheree**. Both could be instant impact-type players and look like mainstays for the next three to four years. The top JUCO offensive tackle in the country **Jordan Spasojevic-Moko** should provide immediate help.

Fisher has quickly turned Texas A&M into a title contender and this class should keep them consistent in that fashion moving forward.

## 8. USC

After a disastrous recruiting class in 2020, where the Trojans finished No. 64 nationally, we see the Pac 12 program back in the Top10. Prospects staying home had a big part in that.

The No. 1 overall prospect in the class, five-star **Korey Foreman**, picked USC over Clemson, where he was once committed, along with LSU and Georgia. Top247 outside linebacker **Raesjon Davis** was a former LSU commit that will also stay out West and suit up at USC.

Quarterback depth was a focal point, and two Top100 guys are already enrolled: **Jaxson Dart**, who had as strong a senior year as any player in the country, and **Miller Moss**. However, defense is the class strength. Besides Foreman and Davis, Top247 defensive tackle **Jay Toia** was a significant pickup, as was Top247 linebacker **Julien Simon**. Recruiting in the secondary was outstanding as four-star cornerbacks **Ceyair Wright**, **Prophet Brown** and **Jaylin Smith** all signed, as did four-star safeties **Anthony Beavers Jr.**, **Calen Bullock** and **Xamarion Gordon**.

This is the type of class that can fully eliminate all the coaching hot seat talk that's been going on around Los Angeles.

## 9. Notre Dame

A pretty standard class for the Irish. It's terrific on the offensive line, has big dynamic receivers and has a lot of high upside guys on defense that should keep Notre Dame in the CFB Playoff equation down the road. The Irish are also right there with Alabama and Oregon in signing one of the best offensive line classes in the country. Offensive tackle **Blake Fisher** and offensive guard **Rocco Spindler** are Top100 recruits with major offers. The Irish flipped four-star offensive tackle **Caleb Johnson** from Auburn, and don't be surprised if, in three years, **Joe Alt** eclipses all of them. The four-star has tremendous potential. He's a former high school tight end who is growing into his massive frame and the son of former first-round draft pick John Alt. The elder Alt had a long NFL career protecting blindsides of quarterbacks and is in the Kansas City Chiefs Hall of Fame. Offensive guard **Pat Coogan** rounds out this outstanding group.

Four-stars **Deion Colzie** and **Lorenzo Styles Jr.** are athletic pass catchers. Styles' father also had a long career in the NFL. Four-star running back **Audric Estime** adds to what is becoming one of Notre Dame's best position rooms, and Brian Kelly and company are hoping four-star **Tyler Buchner** is the quarterback of the future. He's a talented signal-caller who hasn't played much on the prep level (injury as a sophomore, pandemic as a senior) and when he did, it was against low-level California competition.

Linebacker **Prince Kollie** is going to be a star on defense, and the Irish went out to California and stole guys like cornerback **Chance Tucker** and edge players **Will Schweitzer** and **Devin Aupiu**.

## 10. Oklahoma

While the Sooners check-in at No. 10, if you take a closer look at this 16-player class, you see the Big 12 power finished No. 5 nationally when considering average ranking per commit. Pound for pound this was one of the best classes in the country. It's of course loaded on offense, but it's what they've done on the other side of the ball that gets this program closer to winning a national title.

The Sooners have gradually improved on the defensive side under defensive coordinator Alex Grinch, and the guys they landed in 2021 were as strong a haul as they've had in quite some time. To highlight a few, the nation's No. 2 weakside defensive end **Clayton Smith** and No. 7 weakside defensive end **Kelvin Gilliam** were big pickups. Keep an eye on the 6-7, 240-pound **Nathan Rawlins-Kibonge**, who will also play basketball in Norman and has all the traits to develop into one of the nation's best on the defensive front.

Of course, Lincoln Riley went out and signed the No. 1 quarterback in the country in five-star **Caleb Williams**. The Sooners reloaded at receiver led by the No. 4 player at the position **Mario Williiams** and the country's No. 2 athlete **Billy Bowman** who could shine at wideout or in the secondary. Securing a signature from the No. 4 offensive tackle in the class, **Savion Byrd** on National Signing Day, was a coup as well.

## 11. Miami

Manny Diaz and his staff showed big improvement on the field in year two and it seeped over to the recruiting trail where the Hurricanes finished with the No. 2 class in the ACC. Headlining this group was the No. 1 defensive tackle in the country **Leonard Taylor** and the No. 1 safety **James Williams**, a pair of five-stars from the backyard. Miami beat Florida for Taylor and Georgia for Williams.

Of the 22 players that signed, 18 hail from the Sunshine State, most coming from South Florida. A trio of four-star receivers in **Romeo Brinson**, **Jacolby George** and **Brashard Smith** make for the class strength. But four-star running backs **Thad Franklin** and **Cody Brown** could be a punishing duo as well.

The quarterback room Diaz inherited was very suspect, and he and Rhett Lashlee are quickly turning it over. The transfer of **D'Eriq King** was obviously big, but his heir apparent could be the guy who signed this cycle. Top247 recruit **Jake Garcia**, a former USC recruit and California native who played his senior of high school in Georgia, now heads to Coral Gables.

## 12. Florida

The Gators struggled defensively this past fall, but a ton of help is on the way. Dan Mullen and his staff loaded up on this side of the ball in the 2021 cycle.

Securing a signature from five-star cornerback **Jason Marshall** was huge, beating out Miami and Alabama for the No. 2 player at his position. They landed a few difference-makers on the edge in the No. 5 weakside defensive end **Jeremiah Williams**, the No. 7 strongside defensive end **Tyreak Sapp**, four-star **Justus Boone** and the No. 1 overall JUCO prospect **Diwun Black**. Black chose UF coming out of high school in 2019 and stuck with them. Four-star safeties **Corey Collier** and **Donovan McMillon** are significant additions as well.

On the offensive side, four-star quarterback **Carlos Del Rio-Wilson** is an athletic, high upside passer similar to those we've seen Mullen have success with in the past. We're going to look up in two, three years and **Marcus Burke** will be one of the top receivers in the SEC, and tight end **Nick Elksnis** was a sneaky good pick up for the Gators, who say goodbye to the nation's top player at that position, Kyle Pitts.

Florida signed 22 players in 2021.

## 13. Michigan

For a second-straight year, the Wolverines add several dynamic playmakers on offense, including the 247Sports Composite's No. 3 running back **Donovan Edwards**.

Michigan will probably go as far as the jewel of the haul, five-star quarterback **J.J. McCarthy**, takes them. The Chicagoland native is fresh off guiding Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy to a prep national championship. He's the class's No. 2 pro-style signal-caller.

The Wolverines never struggle to land touted offensive linemen and this class includes the No. 8 offensive tackle **Giovanni El-Hadi** and the No. 3 center **Raheem Anderson**.

On defense, linebacker **Junior Colson** has all the makings to be one of the Big Ten's best defenders. He's fast, physical and a hard-hitter. Defensive tackle was a big need as the Wolverines transition into new coordinator Mike MacDonald's scheme and they hit big late. They flipped four-star in-state recruit **Rayshaun Benny** from Michigan State, beat Penn State for four-star **George Rooks** and took sleeper **Ikechkwu Iwunnah** out of the Lone Star State.

## 14. North Carolina

The trajectory of the Tar Heels program continues to soar with another outstanding class. A year after finishing No. 13, North Carolina closes at No. 14. As we head into year three of the Mack Brown era, not many programs have recruited quarterback and the defensive line better over that span, not to mention all the speed North Carolina has netted on both sides of the ball.

Quarterback recruit **Drake Maye** threw for 50 touchdowns and just two interceptions as a junior. The Covid-19 pandemic did not allow for a senior season and he's in Chapel Hill adding to what has quickly become one of the more talented position rooms in America.

Five-star defensive end **Keeshawn Silver** is the class jewel. He's a 6-6, 275-pound specimen who looks like a future first-rounder, and fellow defensive lineman **Jahvaree Ritzie** is going to be special too. Top 247 linebacker signee **Raneiria Dillworth** is a 4.4 guy who could also evolve into a high draft pick. All four mentioned are in-state recruits as UNC signed six of the Top 10, also including four-star linebacker **Power Echols** and athlete **DeAndre Boykins**.

This class is full of more no-brainers like four-star safety/linebacker **Gabe Stephens** and unheralded players that look like future stars in athlete **Caleb Hood** and cornerback **Dontae Balfour**.

North Carolina is putting together a roster that will be annually competitive with Clemson for the ACC crown.

## 15. Texas

The Longhorns run of three-straight Top 10 classes came to an end with this 22-player class, finishing No. 15 nationally. However, there are some pieces that can help the Big 12 program get back on track under new head coach Steve Sarkisian.

Five-star tight end/defensive end **Ja'Tavion Sanders** is the class jewel, a two-way difference-maker that led Denton (Texas) Ryan to a state championship. Running back **Jonathon Brooks** had a special senior season in gaining 3,849 yards from scrimmage and scoring 65 offensive TD's (70 total). The No. 8 wide receiver **Xavier Worthy**, one of the fastest receivers in the land, asked out of his NLI to Michigan and committed to the Longhorns as a big late addition to this class.

Texas stockpiled four-stars on the defensive side this cycle, including several in the secondary in safety **JD Coffey** and cornerbacks **Jamier Johnson** and **Ishmael Ibraheem**. **Derrick Harris Jr.** and **Jordon Thomas** were two of the state's more sought-after defensive linemen. Linebacker **Terrence Cooks** has played a lot of winning football in his prep career.

Moving forward Steve Sarkisian will aim to elevate the Longhorns recruiting efforts, particularly on the offensive line where heading into this year's NFL Draft Texas has only had one player selected over the last decade.

## 16. Wisconsin

The Badgers had never had a Top25 class in the 247Sports era, which dates back to 2010, until now. No surprise the strength is on the offensive line with five-star offensive tackle **Nolan Rucci** leading the way. The Penn State legacy chose to play in Madison over the Nittany Lions and every other powerhouse program in America. Joining Rucci are four-star offensive tackles **JP Benzschawel** and **Riley Mahlman**.

Wisconsin made the defensive side a focal point. Top247 defensive end **TJ Bollers** is the highest-ranked guy in the fold. Safety **Hunter Wohler** is an instinctive hard-hitter, and linebackers **Jake Ratzlaff**, **Darryl Peterson** and **Bryan Sanborn** are tailor-made Badger-type guys.

The Big Ten's sleeper quarterback recruit is **Deacon Hill**, out of California, who has terrific arm talent. Hill had just four offers, but the Badgers identified him early and it should pay off.

## 17. Ole Miss

In Lane Kiffin's first year at the helm, the Rebels offensive attack ranked No. 3 nationally in total offense. That's against an All-SEC schedule we should add. As impressive as that was, the defense was on the complete other end of the spectrum finishing No. 126.

This class will go a long way towards fixing that. The strength of this class, which finished No. 17, is on the defensive side of the ball where the Rebels upgraded on all three levels. Four-star safety **Tysheeem Johnson** has a Jabrill Peppers skill set and is the headliner of a secondary class that also included four-stars **Dink Jackson**, **Markevious Brown** and All-American **MJ Daniels** (a Mississippi State flip).

Four-star defensive tackle **Tywone Malone**, who will also play baseball (and looks like Frank Thomas in the cage); **Taleeq Robbins**; **Isaiah Iton** and **Jamond Gordon** shore things up in the middle of the defense. The latter two are the top ranked JUCO defensive tackles.

Of course, there is more firepower on offense coming as well. Four-star in-state quarterback **Luke Altmyer** flipped from Florida State late as did four-star tight end **Hudson Wolfe**. Four-star receiver **Bralon Brown**, Texas receiver **JJ Henry** and No. 2-ranked JUCO receiver **Qua Davis** look like the next wave of playmakers outside for Kiffin and company.

## 18. Maryland

This Terrapins class closed at No. 18 nationally and tied the program's best finish in the 247Sports standings, matching the 2017 haul. Similar to the situation in Oxford, offensive-minded head coach Mike Locksley knows for his program to become competitive in the Big Ten it needs to shore up the defense. That was certainly the focus in 2021.

The top nine players in this 23-man class will help on the defensive side, led by perhaps the best pure pass rusher of the 2021 cycle in local defensive end **Demeioun Robinson**. In-state recruiting was good on the defensive line as fellow four-stars **Taizse Johnson** and **Tommy Akingbesote** joined Robinson. The 247Sports Composite's No. 1 inside linebacker, five-star **Terrence Lewis**, and Top247 hard-hitting outside linebacker **Branden Jennings** were big coups from the Sunshine State. Jennings is a former Michigan commit.

As Locksley fine-tunes his offense, he needed a couple of tight ends in 2021 and he got four who could play the position in **West Wolff**, **CJ Dippre**, **Joseph Bearns** and **Leron Husbands**.

## 19. Auburn

Auburn went from a Top10 signing class in 2020 to a coaching change just a year later.

Through the transition, the Tigers were able to keep their talented Texas signal-caller in the fold in four-star **Dematrius Davis**, who led Houston (Texas)

North Shore to state titles as a sophomore and junior.

The No. 4 and No. 5 players in the state, four-star defensive end **Dylan Brooks** and four-star defensive tackle **Lee Hunter** are headliners in the class. Brooks originally put pen to paper for Tennessee, but was let out of his letter-of-intent after the coaching change in Knoxville.

**Hal Presley** is going to be a big-time receiver in Bryan Harsin's offense as a 6-foot-3, stretch-the-field type, and **Ahmari Harvey** and **Tar'varish Dawson** are two nice pickups for the secondary out of the state of Florida.

**Tobechi Okoli** could be one of the SEC's biggest steals. He's a 6-5, 255-pound defensive lineman out of Kansas City who was coveted by programs in that region, but chose the stage of the SEC.

## 20. Nebraska

For a fifth-straight year, the Huskers finished with a Top 25 class. The jewel for Scott Frost and company is the No. 2 tight end **Thomas Fidone**, who will be an instant impact player in Lincoln. He can line up attached, in the slot or out wide. He has a skill set similar to Kyle Pitts and chose to stay close to home over a national offer list.

Other four-stars choosing to play at Nebraska include 6-foot-8 offensive tackle **Teddy Prochazka** and athletic linebacker **Randolph Kpai**, the No. 1 recruit in South Dakota. The Huskers also dipped into Hawaii and secured Top 247 linebacker **Wynden Ho'ohuli**.

This class has some sneaky good pickups like road-grading offensive guard **Henry Lutovsky** out of Iowa; in-state tight end **James Carnie**, who should be a matchup nightmare, and two-way lineman **RuQuan Buckley** out of Michigan. Buckley chose the Huskers over Michigan State because no other program recruited him harder.

Frost and his staff now look to turn these Top 25 classes into a Top 25 product on the field.

## 21. Penn State

A small but strong class for head coach James Franklin and his staff that finishes No. 21 nationally. But when looking at average ranking per commit it came in at No. 15.

The nation's No. 7 offensive tackle **Landon Tengwall** is the class's top player, and he enrolled early, bypassing his senior season that was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic to get a head start. You won't find a prospect at any position more physically ready to play on day one than the 6-6, 300-pound Tengwall, a specimen at the position who also plays with the tenacity coveted upfront.

Top 247 receiver **Lonnie White** was a high school quarterback at Malvern Prep and an outstanding three-sport athlete at one point committed to play baseball at Clemson. He can be a game-changer on the perimeter for the Nittany Lions. Four-star receivers **Harrison Wallace** and **Liam Clifford** give Penn State one of the country's best hauls at the position.

The Nittany Lions develop front seven players as well as any program in college football, and defensive ends **Davon Townley** and **Rodney McGraw** are a pair of 6-foot-6 pass rushers. **Jamari Buddin** is a terrific four-star linebacker prospect to mold.

This strong class also included four-star cornerback **Kalen King** and his twin brother **Kobe King** out of Detroit. Offensive guard **Nate Bruce** looks like a mainstay on the O-line for years to come, and four-star safeties **Jaylen Reed** and **Zakee Wheatley** are strong lands as well.

## 22. Tennessee

How quickly things have changed in Knoxville. This time last year, the Vols signed their first Top10 class in years and entered the season with the nation's longest winning streak. Now a coaching change and potential sanctions loom a year later. However, this class still provides a solid foundation at which Josh Huepel and company can work.

Getting that quarterback room in order with a difference-maker was the first order of business. That potential guy is four-star quarterback **Kaidon Salter,** who took Cedar Hill (Texas) High to the state title game as a senior. He's one of the more exciting dual-threat passers and natural throwers in the class.

Other key pieces include the No. 1 JUCO running back **Tiyon Evans**; hard-hitting, instinctive four-star linebacker **Aaron Willis** and four-star instate wideout **Walker Merrill**.

In-state offensive tackle **Williams Parker** was coveted by several other SEC programs, and athlete **Kaemen Marley** and receiver **Julian Nixon** give Huepel two more four-stars to mold.

Through all the turmoil, this class finishing No. 22 shows the potential the program has on the trail when things are rolling on Rocky Top.

## 23. Florida State

The next great Seminoles receiver, **Destyn Hill**, highlights this class. The Louisiana product is one of the more exciting players after the catch with his combination of balance and speed. He can take the top off and he's a major threat in the return game as well. Hill, along with **Malik McClain** and **Joshua Burrell,** make for a nice receiver haul as second-year head coach Mike Norvell and his staff look to get that offense rolling in Tallahassee.

Like so many of these rebuilding programs, defense was the name of the game on the trail. The Seminoles scored two high upside pass rushers in **George Wilson** and **Patrick Payton**. The two are very disruptive players on the prep level, but both will need to add mass to their exciting frames before becoming difference-makers in the ACC.

Florida State aims to shore up their secondary with four-star cornerbacks **Hunter Washington** and **Omarion Cooper**. Back on the offensive side of the ball, tackle **Rod Orr** has all the traits to develop into a great one at his position.

## 24. Iowa

The Hawkeyes signed their best class in the 247Sports era, finishing No. 24 nationally. Naturally, the run on the offensive line leads the way with a trio of four-stars in offensive tackle **David Davidkov**, offensive guard **Connor Colby** and offensive tackle **Beau Stephens**.

Remember the name **Cooper DeJean**. Nobody filled a box score like the four-sport standout and All-American from Battle Creek-Ida Grove (Iowa). He shined at quarterback and defensive back on the prep level in winning a couple of state titles. He's also a physical, above the rim basketball player, and he was selected to play in the All-American Bowl.

Four-star athletes **Arland Bruce IV** and **Keagan Johnson** could help this offense be more potent, and keep an eye on quarterback **Joey Labas,** who emerged later than others at the position. Labas has the talent to become one of the Big Ten's best signal-callers.

## 25. Arkansas

Razorbacks fans should come to expect Top 25 classes under second-year coach Sam Pittman, who is one of the more energetic recruiters in the country.

Three four-stars headline this class, including receiver **Ketron Jackson** (Texas); running back **AJ Green**, one of the fastest players in the country; and physical two-way standout **Raheim Sanders**, who could be the face of the Razorbacks defense down the road.

Pittman was certainly going to sign a good offensive line class, and the state's No. 2 prospect in offensive tackle **Terry Wells** leads the group. He also landed the highly-recruited **Cameron Ball**, out of Atlanta, and intriguing tackle **Cole Carson**, out of the Lone Star State.

Cornerback **Keuan Parker** is a disruptive player in the secondary.

# 100 FOR 2021

## INCOMING FRESHMEN

### TOP 100 PLAYERS

| Rk. | Name | Pos | Ht. | Wt. | High School/Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Korey Foreman | SDE | 6-4 | 265 | Centennial (Corona, CA) | USC |
| 2. | JC Latham | OT | 6-6 | 305 | IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL) | Alabama |
| 3. | J.T. Tuimoloau | SDE | 6-4.5 | 277 | Eastside Catholic (Sammamish, WA) | Ohio State |
| 4. | Jack Sawyer | SDE | 6-5 | 248 | Pickerington North (Pickerington, OH) | Ohio State |
| 5. | Tommy Brockermeyer | OT | 6-6.25 | 283 | All Saints Episcopal (Fort Worth, TX) | Alabama |
| 6. | Caleb Williams | DUAL | 6-1 | 210 | Gonzaga (Washington, DC) | Oklahoma |
| 7. | Amarius Mims | OT | 6-7 | 315 | Bleckley County (Cochran, GA) | Georgia |
| 8. | Dallas Turner | WDE | 6-4 | 245 | St. Thomas Aquinas (Fort Lauderdale, FL) | Alabama |
| 9. | Emeka Egbuka | WR | 6-1 | 190 | Steilacoom (Steilacoom, WA) | Ohio State |
| 10. | Leonard Taylor | DT | 6-4 | 265 | Miami Palmetto (Miami, FL) | Miami |
| 11. | Sam Huard | PRO | 6-2 | 190 | Kennedy Catholic (Bellevue, WA) | Washington |
| 12. | Ja'Tavion Sanders | ATH | 6-3.5 | 235 | Ryan (Denton, TX) | Texas |
| 13. | Tristan Leigh | OT | 6-5 | 270 | Robinson Secondary (Fairfax, VA) | Clemson |
| 14. | James Williams | S | 6-5 | 218 | American Heritage (Opa Locka, FL) | Miami |
| 15. | Nolan Rucci | OT | 6-8 | 295 | Warwick (Lititz, PA) | Wisconsin |
| 16. | Brock Vandagriff | DUAL | 6-3 | 205 | Prince Avenue Christian School (Bogart, GA) | Georgia |
| 17. | Ga'Quincy McKinstry | CB | 6-0.5 | 180 | Pinson Valley (Pinson, AL) | Alabama |
| 18. | Donovan Jackson | OG | 6-4.5 | 308 | Episcopal (Bellaire, TX) | Ohio State |
| 19. | Maason Smith | DT | 6-5 | 316 | Terrebonne (Houma, LA) | LSU |
| 20. | Terrence Lewis | ILB | 6-1 | 200 | Miami Central (Opa Locka, FL) | Maryland |
| 21. | Shemar Turner | DT | 6-3.5 | 282 | DeSoto (DeSoto, TX) | Texas A&M |
| 22. | TreVeyon Henderson | RB | 5-11 | 195 | Hopewell (Hopewell, VA) | Ohio State |
| 23. | Damon Payne | DT | 6-3.5 | 297 | Belleville (Belleville, MI) | Alabama |
| 24. | J.J. McCarthy | PRO | 6-3 | 190 | IMG Academy (La Grange Park, IL) | Michigan |
| 25. | Xavian Sorey | OLB | 6-3 | 214 | IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL) | Georgia |
| 26. | Jacorey Brooks | WR | 6-3 | 185 | IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL) | Alabama |
| 27. | Kyle McCord | PRO | 6-3 | 215 | St. Joseph's (Philadelphia, PA) | Ohio State |
| 28. | Jason Marshall | CB | 6-2 | 180 | Miami Palmetto (Miami, FL) | Florida |
| 29. | Sage Ryan | S | 5-11 | 193 | Lafayette Christian Academy (Lafayette, LA) | LSU |
| 30. | Keeshawn Silver | SDE | 6-6 | 275 | Rocky Mount (Rocky Mount, NC) | North Carolina |
| 31. | Will Shipley | APB | 5-11 | 198 | Weddington (Matthews, NC) | Clemson |
| 32. | Barrett Carter | OLB | 6-1 | 220 | North Gwinnett (Suwanee, GA) | Clemson |
| 33. | Camar Wheaton | RB | 5-11 | 190 | Lakeview Centennial (Garland, TX) | Alabama |
| 34. | Smael Mondon | OLB | 6-3 | 220 | Paulding County (Dallas, GA) | Georgia |
| 35. | Kingsley Suamataia | OT | 6-5 | 280 | Orem (Orem, UT) | Oregon |
| 36. | Jeremiah Trotter Jr. | ILB | 6-0 | 210 | St. Joseph's (Philadelphia, PA) | Clemson |
| 37. | Clayton Smith | WDE | 6-4 | 220 | Texas High (Texarkana, TX) | Oklahoma |
| 38. | Tunmise Adeleye | SDE | 6-3 | 245 | Tompkins (Katy, TX) | Texas A&M |
| 39. | Ty Thompson | PRO | 6-4 | 215 | Mesquite (Gilbert, AZ) | Oregon |
| 40. | Troy Franklin | WR | 6-2 | 170 | Menlo-Atherton (Menlo Park, CA) | Oregon |
| 41. | Donovan Edwards | RB | 5-11 | 190 | West Bloomfield (West Bloomfield, MI) | Michigan |
| 42. | Mario Williams | WR | 5-11 | 178 | Plant City (Plant City, FL) | Oklahoma |
| 43. | Billy Bowman | ATH | 5-10 | 175 | Ryan (Denton, TX) | Oklahoma |
| 44. | Agiye Hall | WR | 6-3 | 190 | Bloomingdale (Valrico, FL) | Alabama |
| 45. | LJ Johnson | RB | 5-10 | 204 | Cy-Fair (Cypress, TX) | Texas A&M |
| 46. | JoJo Earle | WR | 5-9.5 | 170 | Aledo (Aledo, TX) | Alabama |
| 47. | Jake Garcia | PRO | 6-2.5 | 195 | Grayson (Loganville, GA) | Miami |
| 48. | Raesjon Davis | OLB | 6-1 | 215 | Mater Dei (Santa Ana, CA) | USC |
| 49. | Jakailin Johnson | CB | 6-1 | 175 | DeSmet (Saint Louis, MO) | Ohio State |
| 50. | Terrion Arnold | S | 6-0 | 180 | John Paul II Catholic (Tallahassee, FL) | Alabama |
| 51. | Deontae Lawson | ILB | 6-3 | 225 | Mobile Christian School (Mobile, AL) | Alabama |
| 52. | Mike Hall | DT | 6-3 | 290 | Streetsboro (Streetsboro, OH) | Ohio State |
| 53. | Landon Tengwall | OT | 6-6 | 300 | Good Counsel (Olney, MD) | Penn State |
| 54. | Blake Fisher | OT | 6-5.5 | 336 | Avon (Avon, IN) | Notre Dame |
| 55. | Drake Maye | PRO | 6-5 | 210 | Myers Park (Charlotte, NC) | North Carolina |
| 56. | Dont'e Thornton | WR | 6-4.5 | 185 | Mount Saint Joseph (Baltimore, MD) | Oregon |
| 57. | Terrence Ferguson | OG | 6-4 | 300 | Peach County (Fort Valley, GA) | Alabama |
| 58. | Keanu Koht | WDE | 6-4 | 215 | Vero Beach (Vero Beach, FL) | Alabama |
| 59. | Rocco Spindler | OG | 6-4.5 | 315 | Clarkston (Clarkston, MI) | Notre Dame |
| 60. | Jake Briningstool | TE | 6-5 | 215 | Ravenwood (Brentwood, TN) | Clemson |
| 61. | Xavier Worthy | WR | 6-1 | 160 | Central East (Fresno, CA) | Michigan |
| 62. | Tywone Malone | DT | 6-4 | 305 | Bergen Catholic (Oradell, NJ) | Ole Miss |
| 63. | Savion Byrd | OG | 6-5 | 295 | Duncanville (Duncanville, TX) | Oklahoma |
| 64. | Derrick Davis Jr. | S | 6-1 | 194 | Gateway (Monroeville, PA) | LSU |
| 65. | Bryce Foster | OG | 6-4.5 | 330 | Taylor (Katy, TX) | Texas A&M |
| 66. | Micah Morris | OT | 6-4 | 316 | Camden County (Kingsland, GA) | Georgia |
| 67. | Demeioun Robinson | WDE | 6-3 | 220 | Quince Orchard (Gaithersburg, MD) | Maryland |
| 68. | Jaxson Dart | PRO | 6-3 | 210 | Corner Canyon (Draper, UT) | USC |
| 69. | Deion Smith | WR | 6-1.5 | 172 | Jackson Academy (Jackson, MS) | LSU |
| 70. | Tyler Buchner | DUAL | 6-2 | 205 | Helix (La Jolla, CA) | Notre Dame |
| 71. | Nyland Green | CB | 6-2 | 183 | Newton (Covington, GA) | Georgia |
| 72. | Jordan Hancock | CB | 6-1 | 170 | North Gwinnett (Suwanee, GA) | Ohio State |
| 73. | Jeremiah Williams | WDE | 6-3 | 224 | Ramsay (Birmingham, AL) | Florida |
| 74. | Christian Leary | WR | 5-9 | 190 | Edgewater (Orlando, FL) | Alabama |
| 75. | Miller Moss | PRO | 6-2 | 197 | Bishop Alemany (Mission Hills, CA) | USC |
| 76. | Dylan Brooks | WDE | 6-5 | 250 | Handley (Roanoke, AL) | Auburn |
| 77. | Ethan Calvert | ILB | 6-3 | 230 | Oaks Christian (Westlake Village, CA) | Utah |
| 78. | Chris Hilton | WR | 5-11.5 | 169 | Zachary (Zachary, LA) | LSU |
| 79. | Ceyair Wright | CB | 6-1 | 175 | Loyola (Los Angeles, CA) | USC |
| 80. | Lee Hunter | DT | 6-5 | 292 | Blount (Eight Mile, AL) | Auburn |
| 81. | Jalen Milroe | DUAL | 6-3 | 206 | Tompkins (Katy, TX) | Alabama |
| 82. | Evan Pryor | APB | 5-10 | 190 | William Amos Hough (Cornelius, NC) | Ohio State |
| 83. | Garrett Nussmeier | PRO | 6-1.5 | 182 | Marcus (Flower Mound, TX) | LSU |
| 84. | Bram Walden | OT | 6-4 | 270 | Saguaro (Scottsdale, AZ) | Oregon |
| 85. | Beaux Collins | WR | 6-2.5 | 195 | St. John Bosco (Bellflower, CA) | Clemson |
| 86. | Reid Carrico | ILB | 6-3 | 225 | Ironton (Ironton, OH) | Ohio State |
| 87. | Giovanni El-Hadi | OT | 6-5 | 285 | Adlai Stevenson (Sterling Heights, MI) | Michigan |
| 88. | Brian Thomas Jr. | WR | 6-4 | 190 | Walker (Walker, LA) | LSU |
| 89. | Junior Colson | OLB | 6-2 | 228 | Ravenwood (Brentwood, TN) | Michigan |
| 90. | Garrett Dellinger | OT | 6-5 | 280 | Clarkston (Clarkston, MI) | LSU |
| 91. | Monkell Goodwine | SDE | 6-4 | 260 | Rock Creek Christian Acad. (Upper Marlboro, MD) | Alabama |
| 92. | Reuben Fatheree | OT | 6-8 | 305 | Foster (Richmond, TX) | Texas A&M |
| 93. | Thomas Fidone | TE | 6-5 | 225 | Lewis Central (Council Bluffs, IA) | Nebraska |
| 94. | Payton Page | DT | 6-4 | 360 | Dudley (Greensboro, NC) | Clemson |
| 95. | Armoni Goodwin | RB | 5-8 | 190 | Hewitt-Trussville (Trussville, AL) | LSU |
| 96. | David Daniel | ATH | 6-1 | 180 | Woodstock (Woodstock, GA) | Georgia |
| 97. | Marvin Harrison Jr. | WR | 6-3 | 190 | St. Joseph's Prep School (Philadelphia, PA) | Ohio State |
| 98. | Dylan Fairchild | OG | 6-5 | 298 | West Forsyth (Cumming, GA) | Georgia |
| 99. | Jayden Ballard | WR | 6-2 | 175 | Washington (Massillon, OH) | Ohio State |
| 100. | Tyreak Sapp | SDE | 6-2.5 | 255 | St. Thomas Aquinas (Fort Lauderdale, FL) | Florida |

# 100 FOR 2022

## HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

### TOP 100 PLAYERS

| Rk. | Name | Pos | Ht. | Wt. | High School/Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Quinn Ewers | PRO | 6-3 | 206 | Southlake Carroll (Southlake, TX) |
| 2. | Walter Nolen | DT | 6-4 | 300 | St. Benedict at Auburndale (Cordova, TN) |
| 3. | Travis Hunter | CB | 6-1 | 165 | Collins Hill (Suwanee, GA) |
| 4. | Domani Jackson | CB | 6-1 | 185 | Mater Dei (Santa Ana, CA) |
| 5. | Zach Rice | OT | 6-6 | 282 | Liberty Christian Academy (Lynchburg, VA) |
| 6. | Denver Harris | CB | 6-1 | 180 | North Shore (Houston, TX) |
| 7. | Shemar Stewart | SDE | 6-5 | 260 | Monsignor Pace (Opa Locka, FL) |
| 8. | Devon Campbell | OG | 6-3 | 310 | Bowie (Arlington, TX) |
| 9. | Travis Shaw | DT | 6-5 | 310 | Grimsley (Greensboro, NC) |
| 10. | Luther Burden | WR | 6-2 | 194 | East St. Louis (Saint Louis, MO) |
| 11. | Will Johnson | CB | 6-3 | 190 | Grosse Pointe South (Grosse Pointe, MI) |
| 12. | Harold Perkins | OLB | 6-3 | 200 | Cy Park (Cypress, TX) |
| 13. | Jaheim Singletary | CB | 6-1 | 170 | Robert E. Lee (Jacksonville, FL) |
| 14. | Jeremiah Alexander | WDE | 6-2 | 235 | Thompson (Alabaster, AL) |
| 15. | Josh Conerly Jr. | OT | 6-5 | 275 | Rainier Beach (Seattle, WA) |
| 16. | Gabriel Brownlow-Dindy | DT | 6-3 | 275 | Lakeland (Lakeland, FL) |
| 17. | C.J. Hicks | OLB | 6-3 | 220 | Archbishop Alter (Dayton, OH) |
| 18. | Kevin Coleman | WR | 5-11 | 170 | St. Mary's (Saint Louis, MO) |
| 19. | Keon Sabb | ATH | 6-2 | 200 | IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL) |
| 20. | Walker Howard | PRO | 6-1 | 195 | St. Thomas More (Lafayette, LA) |
| 21. | Omari Abor | SDE | 6-4 | 240 | Duncanville (Duncanville, TX) |
| 22. | Ty Simpson | PRO | 6-2 | 185 | Westview (Martin, TN) |
| 23. | Mykel Williams | DT | 6-5 | 265 | Hardaway (Columbus, GA) |
| 24. | Kamari Wilson | S | 6-1 | 195 | IMG Academy (Fort Pierce, FL) |
| 25. | Kelvin Banks | OT | 6-5 | 300 | Summer Creek (Humble, TX) |
| 26. | Bear Alexander | DT | 6-3 | 325 | Brewer (Fort Worth, TX) |
| 27. | Will Campbell | OT | 6-6 | 285 | Neville (Monroe, LA) |
| 28. | Emmanuel Henderson | RB | 6-1 | 185 | Geneva County (Hartford, AL) |
| 29. | Deyon Bouie | ATH | 5-11 | 185 | Bainbridge (Bainbridge, GA) |
| 30. | Jacoby Mathews | S | 6-2 | 205 | Ponchatoula (Ponchatoula, LA) |
| 31. | Malaki Starks | ATH | 6-1 | 200 | Jefferson (Jefferson, GA) |
| 32. | Sam McCall | ATH | 6-0 | 180 | Lake Gibson (Lakeland, FL) |
| 33. | Conner Weigman | DUAL | 6-2 | 208 | Bridgeland (Cypress, TX) |
| 34. | Evan Stewart | WR | 6-0 | 175 | Liberty (Frisco, TX) |
| 35. | Caleb Burton | WR | 6-0 | 165 | Lake Travis (Austin, TX) |
| 36. | Gentry Williams | ATH | 6-0 | 170 | Booker T. Washington (Tulsa, OK) |
| 37. | Jeadyn Lukus | CB | 6-2 | 185 | Mauldin (Mauldin, SC) |
| 38. | Daylen Everette | CB | 6-1 | 185 | IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL) |
| 39. | Enai White | WDE | 6-5 | 230 | Imhotep Institute (Philadelphia, PA) |
| 40. | Tyler Booker | OT | 6-5 | 325 | IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL) |
| 41. | Gunner Stockton | DUAL | 6-1 | 220 | Rabun County (Tiger, GA) |
| 42. | Gavin Sawchuk | RB | 5-11 | 185 | Valor Christian (Littleton, CO) |
| 43. | Gabe Powers | OLB | 6-4 | 230 | Marysville (Marysville, OH) |
| 44. | Khurtiss Perry | DT | 6-3 | 267 | Park Crossing (Montgomery, AL) |
| 45. | Bryce Anderson | S | 6-0 | 190 | West Brook (Beaumont, TX) |
| 46. | Raleek Brown | APB | 5-8 | 185 | Mater Dei (Santa Ana, CA) |
| 47. | Jalon Walker | OLB | 6-2 | 220 | Salisbury (Salisbury, NC) |
| 48. | Jaydon Blue | RB | 6-0 | 205 | Klein Cain (Houston, TX) |
| 49. | Zion Branch | S | 6-3 | 190 | Bishop Gorman (Las Vegas, NV) |
| 50. | Dasan McCullough | ATH | 6-5 | 220 | Bloomington South (Bloomington, IN) |
| 51. | Malick Sylla | WDE | 6-6 | 230 | Katy (Katy, TX) |
| 52. | Jaishawn Barham | ILB | 6-3 | 230 | St. Frances Academy (District Heights, MD) |
| 53. | Cyrus Moss | WDE | 6-6 | 220 | Bishop Gorman (Las Vegas, NV) |
| 54. | Kiyaunta Goodwin | OT | 6-7 | 300 | Charlestown (Charlestown, IN) |
| 55. | Joe Brunner | OT | 6-6 | 300 | Whitefish Bay (Milwaukee, WI) |
| 56. | Derrick Moore | SDE | 6-4 | 245 | St. Frances Academy (Baltimore, MD) |
| 57. | Branson Robinson | RB | 5-10 | 220 | Germantown (Madison, MS) |
| 58. | Talyn Shettron | WR | 6-3 | 185 | Santa Fe (Edmond, OK) |
| 59. | Earnest Greene | OG | 6-5 | 330 | St. John Bosco (Bellflower, CA) |
| 60. | Larry Turner-Gooden | ATH | 6-0 | 179 | St. Bernard (Playa Del Rey, CA) |
| 61. | Shawn Murphy | ILB | 6-2 | 215 | Unity Reed (Manassas, VA) |
| 62. | Marvin Jones Jr. | SDE | 6-4 | 245 | American Heritage (Fort Lauderdale, FL) |
| 63. | Kaleb Brown | WR | 5-11 | 177 | St. Rita (Chicago, IL) |
| 64. | David Bailey | OLB | 6-3 | 220 | Mater Dei (Santa Ana, CA) |
| 65. | Tetairoa McMillan | WR | 6-3 | 185 | Servite (Anaheim, CA) |
| 66. | Khamauri Rogers | CB | 6-1 | 168 | Holmes County (Lexington, MS) |
| 67. | Shazz Preston | WR | 6-0 | 190 | St. James (Saint James, LA) |
| 68. | Tyre West | DT | 6-3 | 280 | Tift County (Tifton, GA) |
| 69. | Cade Klubnik | PRO | 6-3 | 186 | Westlake (Austin, TX) |
| 70. | Dani Dennis-Sutton | SDE | 6-5 | 250 | McDonogh School (Owings Mills, MD) |
| 71. | Xavier Nwankpa | S | 6-2 | 190 | Southeast Polk (Altoona, IA) |
| 72. | C.J. Williams | WR | 6-2 | 193 | Mater Dei (Santa Ana, CA) |
| 73. | Jaylen Sneed | OLB | 6-2 | 210 | Hilton Head (Hilton Head Island, SC) |
| 74. | Maalik Murphy | PRO | 6-5 | 225 | Junipero Serra (Gardena, CA) |
| 75. | Trequon Fegans | CB | 6-2 | 181 | Oxford (Oxford, AL) |
| 76. | AJ Duffy | PRO | 6-2 | 203 | IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL) |
| 77. | Jake Johnson | TE | 6-5 | 225 | Oconee County (Bogart, GA) |
| 78. | Kenyatta Jackson | WDE | 6-5 | 231 | Chaminade-Madonna Prep (Hollywood, FL) |
| 79. | Tyler Morris | WR | 6-0 | 175 | Nazareth Academy (Bolingbrook, IL) |
| 80. | Oscar Delp | TE | 6-5 | 220 | West Forsyth (Cumming, GA) |
| 81. | Niuafe Tuihalamaka | ILB | 6-2 | 238 | Bishop Alemany (Mission Hills, CA) |
| 82. | PJ Williams | OT | 6-4 | 250 | Dickinson (Dickinson, TX) |
| 83. | Terrance Brooks | CB | 5-11 | 190 | John Paul II (Plano, TX) |
| 84. | Sam Horn | PRO | 6-4 | 190 | Collins Hill (Suwanee, GA) |
| 85. | Caden Curry | DT | 6-5 | 250 | Center Grove (Greenwood, IN) |
| 86. | Brenen Thompson | WR | 5-10 | 165 | Spearman (Spearman, TX) |
| 87. | Robert Woodyard | ILB | 6-1 | 210 | Williamson (Mobile, AL) |
| 88. | Shaleak Knotts | WR | 6-2 | 175 | Monroe (Monroe, NC) |
| 89. | Bryan Allen Jr. | S | 6-0 | 185 | Aledo (Aledo, TX) |
| 90. | Kojo Antwi | WR | 6-1 | 185 | Lambert (Suwanee, GA) |
| 91. | Gavin Wimsatt | DUAL | 6-3 | 200 | Owensboro (Owensboro, KY) |
| 92. | Kobie McKinzie | ILB | 6-3 | 227 | Lubbock-Cooper (Lubbock, TX) |
| 93. | Le'veon Moss | RB | 6-0 | 190 | Istrouma Senior (Baton Rouge, LA) |
| 94. | Jaleel Skinner | TE | 6-5 | 210 | Greer (Greer, SC) |
| 95. | Chace Biddle | S | 6-0 | 190 | Garland (Garland, TX) |
| 96. | Azareyeh Thomas | ATH | 6-3 | 176 | Niceville (Niceville, FL) |
| 97. | George Pettaway | RB | 5-11 | 185 | Nansemond-Suffolk Academy (Suffolk, VA) |
| 98. | Marquis Groves-Killebrew | CB | 6-0 | 180 | Brookwood (Snellville, GA) |
| 99. | Nicholas Singleton | RB | 6-0 | 210 | Governor Mifflin (Reading, PA) |
| 100. | Kam Dewberry | OT | 6-4 | 313 | Atascocita (Humble, TX) |

# TOP 5 PLAYERS

## BY POSITION

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **QUARTERBACK** | | | | | |
| 6. Caleb Williams | DUAL | 6-1 | 210 | Gonzaga (Washington, DC) | Oklahoma |
| 11. Sam Huard | PRO | 6-2 | 190 | Kennedy Catholic (Bellevue, WA) | Washington |
| 16. Brock Vandagriff | DUAL | 6-3 | 205 | Prince Avenue Christian School (Bogart, GA) | Georgia |
| 24. J.J. McCarthy | PRO | 6-3 | 190 | IMG Academy (La Grange Park, IL) | Michigan |
| 27. Kyle McCord | PRO | 6-3 | 215 | St. Joseph's (Philadelphia, PA) | Ohio State |
| **RUNNING BACK** | | | | | |
| 22. TreVeyon Henderson | RB | 5-11 | 195 | Hopewell (Hopewell, VA) | Ohio State |
| 31. Will Shipley | APB | 5-11 | 198 | Weddington (Matthews, NC) | Clemson |
| 33. Camar Wheaton | RB | 5-11 | 190 | Lakeview Centennial (Garland, TX) | Alabama |
| 41. Donovan Edwards | RB | 5-11 | 190 | West Bloomfield (West Bloomfield, MI) | Michigan |
| 45. LJ Johnson | RB | 5-10 | 204 | Cy-Fair (Cypress, TX) | Texas A&M |
| **WIDE RECEIVER** | | | | | |
| 9. Emeka Egbuka | WR | 6-1 | 190 | Steilacoom (Steilacoom, WA) | Ohio State |
| 26. Jacorey Brooks | WR | 6-3 | 185 | IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL) | Alabama |
| 40. Troy Franklin | WR | 6-2 | 170 | Menlo-Atherton (Menlo Park, CA) | Oregon |
| 42. Mario Williams | WR | 5-11 | 178 | Plant City (Plant City, FL) | Oklahoma |
| 44. Agiye Hall | WR | 6-3 | 190 | Bloomingdale (Valrico, FL) | Alabama |
| **TIGHT END** | | | | | |
| 60. Jake Briningstool | TE | 6-5 | 215 | Ravenwood (Brentwood, TN) | Clemson |
| 93. Thomas Fidone | TE | 6-5 | 225 | Lewis Central (Council Bluffs, IA) | Nebraska |
| 105. Brock Bowers | TE | 6-3 | 225 | Napa (Napa, CA) | Georgia |
| 130. Michael Trigg | TE | 6-3 | 230 | Carrollwood Day (Tampa, FL) | USC |
| 156. Moliki Matavao | TE | 6-5 | 240 | Liberty (Henderson, NV) | Oregon |
| **OFFENSIVE LINE** | | | | | |
| 2. JC Latham | OT | 6-6 | 305 | IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL) | Alabama |
| 5. Tommy Brockermeyer | OT | 6-6.25 | 283 | All Saints Episcopal (Fort Worth, TX) | Alabama |
| 7. Amarius Mims | OT | 6-7 | 315 | Bleckley County (Cochran, GA) | Georgia |
| 13. Tristan Leigh | OT | 6-5 | 270 | Robinson Secondary (Fairfax, VA) | Clemson |
| 15. Nolan Rucci | OT | 6-8 | 295 | Warwick (Lititz, PA) | Wisconsin |
| **DEFENSIVE TACKLE** | | | | | |
| 10. Leonard Taylor | DT | 6-4 | 265 | Miami Palmetto (Miami, FL) | Miami |
| 19. Maason Smith | DT | 6-5 | 316 | Terrebonne (Houma, LA) | LSU |
| 21. Shemar Turner | DT | 6-3.5 | 282 | DeSoto (DeSoto, TX) | Texas A&M |
| 23. Damon Payne | DT | 6-3.5 | 297 | Belleville (Belleville, MI) | Alabama |
| 52. Mike Hall | DT | 6-3 | 290 | Streetsboro (Streetsboro, OH) | Ohio State |
| **DEFENSIVE END** | | | | | |
| 1. Korey Foreman | SDE | 6-4 | 265 | Centennial (Corona, CA) | USC |
| 3. J.T. Tuimoloau | SDE | 6-4.5 | 277 | Eastside Catholic (Sammamish, WA) | Ohio State |
| 4. Jack Sawyer | SDE | 6-5 | 248 | Pickerington North (Pickerington, OH) | Ohio State |
| 8. Dallas Turner | WDE | 6-4 | 245 | St. Thomas Aquinas (Fort Lauderdale, FL) | Alabama |
| 30. Keeshawn Silver | SDE | 6-6 | 275 | Rocky Mount (Rocky Mount, NC) | North Carolina |
| **LINEBACKER** | | | | | |
| 20. Terrence Lewis | ILB | 6-1 | 200 | Miami Central (Opa Locka, FL) | Maryland |
| 25. Xavian Sorey | OLB | 6-3 | 214 | IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL) | Georgia |
| 32. Barrett Carter | OLB | 6-1 | 220 | North Gwinnett (Suwanee, GA) | Clemson |
| 34. Smael Mondon | OLB | 6-3 | 220 | Paulding County (Dallas, GA) | Georgia |
| 36. Jeremiah Trotter Jr. | ILB | 6-0 | 210 | St. Joseph's (Philadelphia, PA) | Clemson |
| **DEFENSIVE BACK** | | | | | |
| 14. James Williams | S | 6-5 | 218 | American Heritage (Opa Locka, FL) | Miami |
| 17. Ga'Quincy McKinstry | CB | 6-0.5 | 180 | Pinson Valley (Pinson, AL) | Alabama |
| 28. Jason Marshall | CB | 6-2 | 180 | Miami Palmetto (Miami, FL) | Florida |
| 29. Sage Ryan | S | 5-11 | 193 | Lafayette Christian Academy (Lafayette, LA) | LSU |
| 49. Jakailin Johnson | CB | 6-1 | 175 | DeSmet (Saint Louis, MO) | Ohio State |
| **ATHLETE** | | | | | |
| 12. Ja'Tavion Sanders | ATH | 6-3.5 | 235 | Ryan (Denton, TX) | Texas |
| 43. Billy Bowman | ATH | 5-10 | 175 | Ryan (Denton, TX) | Oklahoma |
| 96. David Daniel | ATH | 6-1 | 180 | Woodstock (Woodstock, GA) | Georgia |
| 135. Kadarius Calloway | ATH | 6-0 | 210 | Philadelphia (Philadelphia, MS) | Alabama |
| 152. Kaemen Marley | ATH | 6-2 | 206 | Eastern Randolph (Ramseur, NC) | Tennessee |

# TOP 5 SCHOOLS

## BY POSITION

### QUARTERBACK

**USC**

Jaxson Dart, 6-3/210, Draper (Utah) Corner Canyon

Miller Moss, 6-2/197, Mission Hills (Calif.) Bishop Alemany

**Oklahoma**

Caleb Williams, 6-1/210, Washington (D.C.) Gonzaga

**Georgia**

Brock Vandagriff, 6-3/205, Bogart (Ga.) Prince Avenue Christian

**Washington**

Sam Huard, 6-2/190, Burien (Wash.) Kennedy Catholic

**Michigan**

J.J. McCarthy, 6-3/190, Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy

### RUNNING BACK

**Ohio State**

TreVeyon Henderson, 5-11/195, Hopewell (Va.) High

Evan Pryor, 5-10/190, Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough

**Clemson**

Will Shipley, 5-11/198, Matthews (N.C.) Weddington

Phil Mafah, 6-1/215, Loganville (Ga.) Grayson

**Texas A&M**

LJ Johnson, 5-10/204, Cypress (Texas) Cy-Fair

Amari Daniels, 5-8/200, Miami (Fla.) Central

**LSU**

Armoni Goodwin, 5-8/190, Trussville (Ala.) Hewitt-Trussville

Corey Kiner, 5-10/210, Cincinnati (Ohio) Roger Bacon

**Michigan**

Donovan Edwards, 5-11/190, West Bloomfield (Mich.) High

Tavierre Dunlap, 6-0/196, Del Valle (Texas) High

### WIDE RECEIVER

**Alabama**

Jacorey Brooks, 6-3/185, Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy

Agiye Hall, 6-3/190, Valrico (Fla.) Bloomingdale

JoJo Earle, 5-9.5/170, Aledo (Texas) High

Christian Leary, 5-9/190, Orlando (Fla.) Edgewater

**LSU**

Deion Smith, 6-1.5/172, Jackson (Miss.) Jackson Academy

Chris Hilton, 5-11.5/169, Zachary (La.) High

Brian Thomas Jr., 6-4/190, Walker (La.) High

Malik Nabers, 6-0/190, Youngsville (La.) Southside

Jack Bech, 6-2/215, Lafayette (La.) St. Thomas More

### Ohio State

Emeka Egbuka, 6-1/190, Steilacoom (Wash.) High

Marvin Harrison Jr., 6-3/190, Philadelphia (Pa.) St. Joseph's Prep

Jayden Ballard, 6-2/175, Massillon (Ohio) Washington

### Oregon

Troy Franklin, 6-2/170, Menlo Park (Calif.) Menlo-Atherton

Dont'e Thornton, 6-4.5/185, Baltimore (Md.) Mount Saint Joseph

Isaiah Brevard, 6-4/200, Southaven (Miss.) High

### Oklahoma

Mario Williams, 5-11/178, Plant City (Fla.) High

Cody Jackson, 6-0/175, Richmond (Texas) Foster

Jalil Farooq, 6-1/200, Upper Marlboro (Md.) Dr. Henry Wise

## TIGHT END

### Oregon

Moliki Matavao, 6-6/240, Henderson (Nev.) Liberty

Terrance Ferguson, 6-5/230, Littleton (Colo.) Heritage

### USC

Michael Trigg, 6-3/230, Tampa (Fla.) Carrollwood Day

Lake McRee, 6-4/217, Austin (Texas) Lake Travis

### Nebraska

Thomas Fidone, 6-5/225, Council Bluffs (Iowa) Lewis Central

James Carnie, 6-5/220, Firth (Neb.) Norris

AJ Rollins, 6-6/220, Omaha (Neb.) Creighton Prep

### Florida

Gage Wilcox, 6-4/228, Tampa (Fla.) Jefferson

Nick Elksnis, 6-6/220, Jacksonville (Fla.) Episcopal

### Notre Dame

Cane Berrong, 6-4/230, Hartwell (Ga.) Hart County

Mitchell Evans, 6-7/240, Wadsworth (Ohio) High

## OFFENSIVE LINE

### Alabama

JC Latham, 6-6/305, Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy

Tommy Brockermeyer, 6-6.5/283, Fort Worth (Texas) All Saints Episcopal

Terrence Ferguson, 6-4/300, Fort Valley (Ga.) Peach County

James Brockermeyer, 6-3/273, Fort Worth (Texas) All Saints Episcopal

Jaeden Roberts, 6-5/340, Houston (Texas) North Shore

### Georgia

Amarius Mims, 6-7/315, Cochran (Ga.) Bleckley County

Micah Morris, 6-4/316, Kingsland (Ga.) Camden County

Dylan Fairchild, 6-5/298, Cumming (Ga.) West Forsyth

Jared Wilson, 6-4/325, Clemmons (N.C.) West Forsyth

### Clemson

Tristan Leigh, 6-5/270, Fairfax (Va.) Robinson Secondary

Marcus Tate, 6-4.5/318, Miami Gardens (Fla.) TRU Prep Academy

Dietrick Pennington, 6-5/326, Cordova (Tenn.) Evangelical Christian

Ryan Linthicum, 6-4/275, Damascus (Md.) High

### Oregon

Kingsley Suamataia, 6-5/280, Orem (Utah) High

Bram Walden, 6-4/270, Scottsdale (Ariz.) Saguaro

Jackson Light, 6-3/284, Draper (Utah) Corner Canyon

Jonah Miller, 6-6.5/260, Tucson (Ariz.) Sahuaro

### Wisconsin

Nolan Rucci, 6-8/295, Lititz (Pa.) Warwick

JP Benzschawel, 6-7/285, Grafton (Wis.) High

Riley Mahlman, 6-7/290, Lakeville (Minn.) South

## DEFENSIVE LINE

### Alabama

Dallas Turner, 6-4/245, Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas

Damon Payne, 6-3.5/297, Belleville (Mich.) High

Keanu Koht, 6-4/215, Vero Beach (Fla.) High

Mankell Goodwine, 6-4/260, Upper Marlboro (Md.) Rock Creek Christian Acad.

Tim Keenan, 6-2/330, Birmingham (Ala.) Ramsay

Anquin Barnes, 6-5/299, Montgomery (Ala.) Robert E. Lee

### Texas A&M

Shemar Turner, 6-3.5/282, DeSoto (Texas) High

Tunmise Adeleye, 6-3/245, Katy (Texas) Tompkins

Marcus Burris, 6-4/280, Texarkana (Texas) Pleasant Grove

Elijah Jeudy, 6-3/246, Philadelphia (Pa.) Northeast

Jahzion Harris, 6-4/215, Brooklyn (N.Y.) Erasmus Hall

Albert Regis, 6-1/300, La Porte (Texas) High

### Ohio State

Jack Sawyer, 6-5/248, Pickering (Ohio) North

Mike Hall, 6-3/290, Streetsboro (Ohio) High

Tyleik Williams, 6-3/330, Manassas (Va.) Unity Reed

### Oklahoma

Clayton Smith, 6-4/220, Texarkana (Texas) Texas High

Kelvin Gilliam, 6-3/250, Highland Springs (Va.) High

Ethan Downs, 6-4/240, Weatherford (Okla.) High

Nathan Rawlins-Kibonge, 6-7/240, Portland (Ore.) Jefferson

Isaiah Coe, 6-3/305, Council Bluffs (Iowa) Iowa Western

### LSU

Maason Smith, 6-5/316, Houma (La.) Terrebonne

Landon Jackson, 6-6/240, Texarkana (Texas) Pleasant Grove

Bryce Langston, 6-2.5/260, Ocala (Fla.) Vanguard

Saivion Jones, 6-5/240, Saint James (La.) St. James

## LINEBACKER

### Georgia

Xavian Sorey, 6-3/214, Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy

Smael Mondon, 6-3/220, Dallas (Ga.) Paulding County

Jamon Dumas-Johnson, 6-1/235, Baltimore (Md.) St. Francis Academy

Chaz Chambliss, 6-2/239, Carrollton (Ga.) High

### Alabama

Deontae Lawson, 6-3/225, Mobile (Ala.) Mobile Christian School

Kendrick Blackshire, 6-2/245, Duncanville (Texas) High

Ian Jackson, 6-2/225, Prattville (Ala.) High

### Clemson

Barrett Carter, 6-1/220, Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett

Jeremiah Trotter Jr., 6-0/210, Philadelphia (Pa.) St. Joseph's

### Maryland

Terrence Lewis, 6-1/200, Miami (Fla.) Central

Brandon Jennings, 6-3.5/225, Jacksonville (Fla.) Sandalwood

Gereme Spraggins, 6-2/235, Hutchinson (Kan.) Hutchinson C.C.

### North Carolina

Raneiria Dillworth, 6-2/193, Kernersville (N.C.) Glenn

Power Echols, 6-1/206, Charlotte (N.C.) Zebulon B. Vance

Gabe Stephens, 6-3/205, Mount Holly (N.C.) Mountain Island Charter

## DEFENSIVE BACK

### Alabama

Ga'Quincy McKinstry, 6-0.5/180, Pinson (Ala.) Pinson Valley

Terrion Arnold, 6-0/180, Tallahassee (Fla.) John Paul II Catholic

Kadarius Calloway, 6-0/210, Philadelphia (Miss.) High

Kaine Williams, 6-2/205, Marrero (La.) John Ehret

Devonta Smith, 6-0/185, Cincinnati (Ohio) La Salle

Khyree Jackson, 6-3/197, Scooba (Miss.) East Mississippi C.C.

### Ohio State

Jakailin Johnson, 6-1/175, Saint Louis (Mo.) DeSmet

Jordan Hancock, 6-1/170, Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett

Andre Turrentine, 6-0/175, Nashville (Tenn.) Ensworth

Jantzen Dunn, 6-2/178, Bowling Green (Ky.) South Warren

Denzel Burke, 6-0/189, Scottsdale (Ariz.) Saguaro

Jaylen Johnson, 6-1/200, Cincinnati (Ohio) La Salle

### Florida

Jason Marshall, 6-2/180, Miami (Fla.) Palmetto

Corey Collier, 6-2/170, Miami (Fla.) Palmetto

Donovan McMillon, 6-2/193, Canonsburg (Pa.) Peters Township

Jordan Young, 6-0/185, Tampa (Fla.) Gaither

Dakota Mitchell, 6-0/185, Winter Park (Fla.) High

### LSU

Sage Ryan, 5-11/193, Lafayette (La.) Lafayette Christian Academy

Derrick Davis Jr., 6-1/194, Monroeville (Pa.) Gateway

Damarius McGhee, 6-1/163, Pensacola (Fla.) Catholic

Matthew Langlois, 6-0/185, New Roads (La.) Catholic of Pointe Coupee

### Oregon

Avante Dickson, 6-0/170, Omaha (Neb.) Westside

Jaylin Davies, 6-1/165, Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei

Daymon David, 6-1/178, Reisterstown (Md.) Franklin

Jeffrey Bassa, 6-3/200, Salt Lake City (Utah) Kearns

Darren Barkins, 6-0/170, Chula Vista (Calif.) Mater Dei Catholic

# Sidelines 2021

COASTAL CAROLINA
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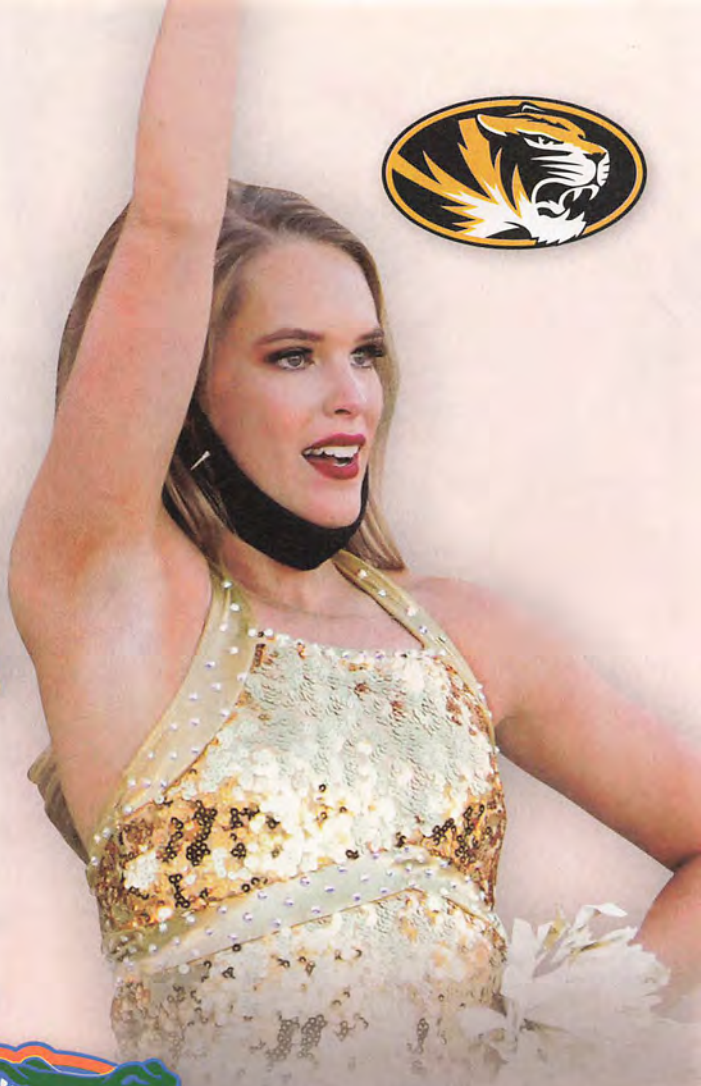

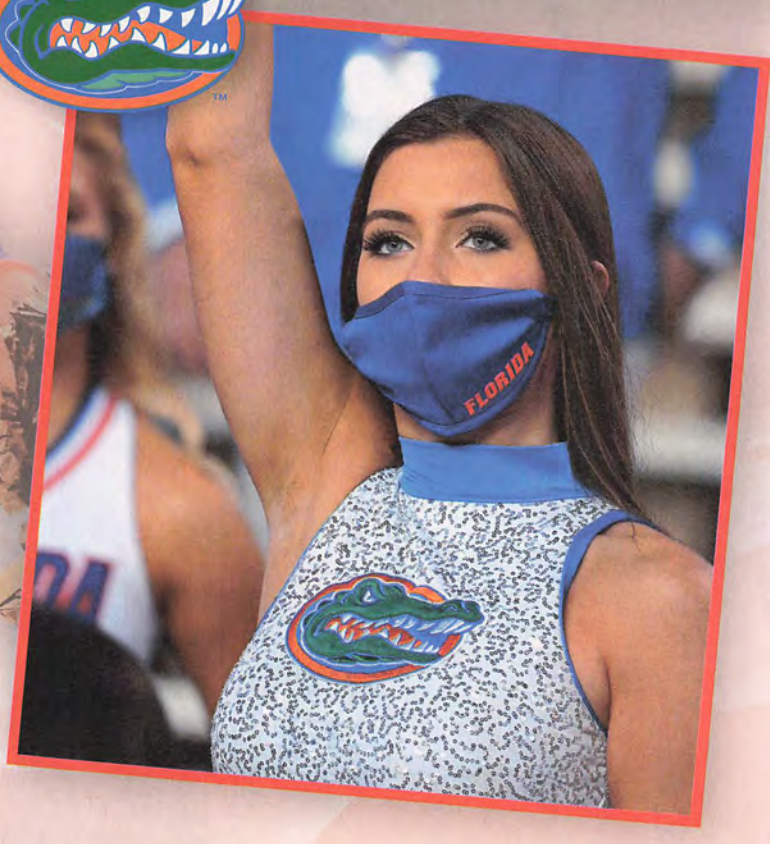
FLORIDA

STATE
Ole Miss
CINCINNATI

# KEEPING *the* FAITH

BY BILL SORRELL

## THERE'S NO MISTAKING TANNER MORGAN AND HIS FAITH

When Tanner Morgan turns the corner in the University of Minnesota athletic building he sometimes gets mistaken for head football coach P.J. Fleck. Both are bald.

A redshirt senior quarterback, Morgan turned the corner spiritually when he got to Minnesota.

"When I got to college, my faith became my own after my first year. I truly decided to follow Jesus," said Morgan.

During Ultimate Training Camp, sponsored by Athletes in Action for college and pro athletes about how to blend faith and sports, Morgan's eyes were opened about how he looked at God.

"My relationship with God was like a genie in a bottle, about things He could do for me. My life changed completely when I realized that my view with God was totally off. My life changed forever. I know who the most important relationship is in my life."

Teaching a team Bible study, Morgan told players, "When I invited Jesus into my heart, when I followed Christ with everything, to be on that path, that was a turning point. I had Christ fully in my life. The greatest decision anyone can make is accepting Christ in your life."

Morgan considers football as a tool to worship God, how he plays and how he treats people on the field. On game days, he writes on his wrist band a capital W and a small w, Worship and win. He writes AO1 (Audience of One) on his wrist tape.

"Just because you are a Christian doesn't mean you can't be a competitor. God encourages us to run the race to win. The Bible (1 Corinthians 9:24) talks about running the race in our walk with Christ."

At Minnesota, Morgan has been a winner. He led the Golden Gophers to an 11-2 record in 2019, including Top 10 wins over Penn State and Auburn, which was in the Outback Bowl.

He has set 11 school records, including season passing yards (3,253), season touchdown passes (30), season completion percentage (66 percent, 210 of 318), all in 2019. In a win over Purdue in 2019, he set a Big Ten Conference record for highest completion percentage (95.45 percent, 21 of 22).

Fleck, the 2019 Big Ten Coach of the Year, calls Morgan an elite leader by his words and actions.

**Tanner Morgan**

Photo by Kim Klement-USA TODAY Sports

Holder Casey O'Brien, Morgan's teammate from 2017-2020, said, "Everything that goes on in our football program runs through Tanner. He has the most respect of any player in this building and his work ethic and performance have earned that."

Morgan wants to inspire his team as a leader and get better in every area of his life. Playing at Ryle High School in Union, Ky., his junior and senior years and at Hazard, Ky., High School his freshman and sophomore years, Morgan threw for over 10,000 yards and was a finalist for Mr. Kentucky Football in 2016.

His cousin Tim Couch, University of Kentucky quarterback from 1996-98 and Cleveland Browns quarterback from 1999-2003, told him that doing things the right way will pay off.

"People look up to you. You are in the spotlight," Morgan said. "That gives you a platform to talk about the Good News of Jesus. All the terrible things that go on in the world allows the opportunity to share what is good and about God. God's purpose for me is to spread the gospel, to be able to bring people to the kingdom of God."

He calls Ephesians 2:8-9 vital. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, not of yourselves, a gift of God not by works lest any man should boast."

"That is so powerful because it is not about what we do. We can have eternity with Him because it is not about what we do, but what He did."

In Spring 2020, his father Ted Morgan was diagnosed with an aggressive brain tumor.

"I was broken. I was scared, in fear of losing my dad. Fear is one of the things that comes with cancer. Cancer is a really scary thing," the younger Morgan said.

Ted Morgan had surgery after his diagnosis and is now taking oral chemotherapy.

"We came together with God's help. He met my Dad's needs. It's something that God did, not a medical thing. He is so passionate about the Lord Jesus. His faith was so comforting as well as God giving us strength," said Tanner.

O'Brien, a five-time cancer survivor, said of Morgan, "He has always been there for me and supported me through every one of my battles with cancer. He is a very positive spiritual influence in my life and a great friend.

"He has encouraged me to strengthen my faith because I see how much confidence he lives with trusting God. He has given me verses when I have been battling cancer that have inspired me to put my faith completely in God's hands. He trusts in God in everything he does."

Morgan, who is active in Currynt, a partnership of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and Athletes in Action, tries to walk in the Spirit daily.

"How I use my faith in everyday life is having to have trust and belief that I am called to a greater purpose," he said. "It allows you to know who you are instead of what you do. First our identity is being a Christian, not being a football player."

"Tanner makes a difference every day on our team athletically, academically, socially and spiritually," Fleck said. "The hard part about being the standard is that you are the standard. Tanner has accepted and welcomed the role of being the standard and does not shy away from responsibility."

A life verse for Morgan is Colossians 3:23, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord, not for man."

"I have matured in my faith. The road isn't always an easy one. We are not promised an easy life being a Christian. But in our hardships that we endure in life, we are able to glorify God. Paul is an awesome example of that," he said. "I want to do my best to be my best every day."

Said Fleck, "When you have faith as strong as Tanner, you believe you can accomplish anything."

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# NATIONAL SCHEDULES

## AAC

### CENTRAL FLORIDA (UCF)
Sept. 4 BOISE STATE
Sept. 11 BETHUNE-COOKMAN
Sept. 17 at Louisville
Oct. 2 at Navy
Oct. 9 EAST CAROLINA
Oct. 16 at Cincinnati
Oct. 22 MEMPHIS
Oct. 30 at Temple
Nov. 6 TULANE
Nov. 13 at SMU
Nov. 20 CONNECTICUT
Nov. 26 SOUTH FLORIDA

### CINCINNATI
Sept. 4 MIAMI (OH)
Sept. 11 MURRAY STATE
Sept. 18 at Indiana
Oct. 2 at Notre Dame
Oct. 8 TEMPLE
Oct. 16 UCF
Oct. 23 at Navy
Oct. 30 at Tulane
Nov. 6 TULSA
Nov. 12 at South Florida
Nov. 20 SMU
Nov. 27 at East Carolina

### EAST CAROLINA
Sept. 2 vs. Appalachian State (Charlotte, NC)
Sept. 11 SOUTH CAROLINA
Sept. 18 at Marshall
Sept. 25 CHARLESTON SOUTHERN
Oct. 2 TULANE
Oct. 9 at UCF
Oct. 23 at Houston
Oct. 28 SOUTH FLORIDA
Nov. 6 TEMPLE
Nov. 13 CONNECTICUT
Nov. 20 at Navy
Nov. 26 CINCINNATI

### HOUSTON
Sept. 4 vs. Texas Tech (NRG Stadium)
Sept. 11 at Rice
Sept. 18 GRAMBLING
Sept. 25 NAVY
Oct. 1 at Tulsa
Oct. 7 at Tulane
Oct. 23 EAST CAROLINA
Oct. 30 SMU
Nov. 6 at South Florida
Nov. 13 at Temple
Nov. 19 MEMPHIS
Nov. 27 at Connecticut

### MEMPHIS
Sept. 4 NICHOLLS STATE
Sept. 11 at Arkansas State
Sept. 18 MISSISSIPPI STATE
Sept. 25 UTSA
Oct. 2 at Temple
Oct. 9 at Tulsa
Oct. 14 NAVY
Oct. 22 NC STATE
Nov. 6 SMU
Nov. 13 ECU
Nov. 19 at Houston
Nov. 26 TULANE

### NAVY
Sept. 4 MARSHALL
Sept. 11 AIR FORCE
Sept. 25 at Houston
Oct. 2 UCF
Oct. 9 SMU
Oct. 14 at Memphis
Oct. 23 CINCINNATI
Oct. 29 at Miami
Nov. 6 at Notre Dame
Nov. 20 EAST CAROLINA
Nov. 27 at Temple
Dec. 11 vs. Army (East Rutherford, NJ)

### SMU
Sept. 4 ABILENE CHRISTIAN
Sept. 11 NORTH TEXAS
Sept. 18 at Louisiana Tech
Sept. 25 at TCU
Oct. 2 SOUTH FLORIDA
Oct. 9 at Navy
Oct. 21 TULANE
Oct. 30 at Houston
Nov. 6 at Memphis
Nov. 13 UCF
Nov. 20 at Cincinnati
Nov. 26 TULSA

### SOUTH FLORIDA
Sept. 2 at NC State
Sept. 11 FLORIDA
Sept. 18 FLORIDA A&M
Sept. 25 at BYU
Oct. 2 at SMU
Oct. 16 TULSA
Oct. 23 TEMPLE
Oct. 28 at ECU
Nov. 6 HOUSTON
Nov. 12 CINCINNATI
Nov. 20 at Tulane
Nov. 26 at UCF

### TEMPLE
Sept. 4 at Rutgers
Sept. 11 at Akron
Sept. 18 BOSTON COLLEGE
Sept. 25 WAGNER
Oct. 2 MEMPHIS
Oct. 8 at Cincinnati
Oct. 23 at South Florida
Oct. 30 UCF
Nov. 6 at East Carolina
Nov. 13 HOUSTON
Nov. 20 at Tulsa
Nov. 27 NAVY

### TULANE
Sept. 4 OKLAHOMA
Sept. 11 MORGAN STATE
Sept. 18 at Ole Miss
Sept. 25 UAB
Oct. 2 at East Carolina
Oct. 7 HOUSTON
Oct. 21 at SMU
Oct. 30 CINCINNATI
Nov. 6 at UCF
Nov. 13 TULSA
Nov. 20 USF
Nov. 27 at Memphis

### TULSA
Sept. 2 UC DAVIS
Sept. 11 at Oklahoma State
Sept. 18 at Ohio State
Sept. 25 ARKANSAS STATE
Oct. 1 HOUSTON
Oct. 9 MEMPHIS
Oct. 16 at South Florida
Oct. 29 NAVY
Nov. 6 at Cincinnati
Nov. 13 at Tulane
Nov. 20 TEMPLE
Nov. 27 at SMU

## ACC

### BOSTON COLLEGE
Sept. 4 COLGATE
Sept. 11 at Massachusetts
Sept. 18 at Temple
Sept. 25 MISSOURI
Oct. 2 at Clemson
Oct. 16 NC STATE
Oct. 23 at Louisville
Oct. 30 at Syracuse
Nov. 5 VIRGINIA TECH
Nov. 13 at Georgia Tech
Nov. 20 FLORIDA STATE
Nov. 27 WAKE FOREST

### CLEMSON
Sept. 4 vs. Georgia (Charlotte, NC)
Sept. 11 SOUTH CAROLINA STATE
Sept. 18 GEORGIA TECH
Sept. 25 at NC State
Oct. 2 BOSTON COLLEGE
Oct. 15 at Syracuse
Oct. 23 at Pittsburgh
Oct. 30 FLORIDA STATE
Nov. 6 at Louisville
Nov. 13 CONNECTICUT
Nov. 20 WAKE FOREST
Nov. 27 at South Carolina

### DUKE
Sept. 4 at Charlotte
Sept. 11 NORTH CAROLINA A&T
Sept. 18 NORTHWESTERN
Sept. 25 KANSAS
Oct. 2 at North Carolina
Oct. 9 GEORGIA TECH
Oct. 16 at Virginia
Oct. 30 at Wake Forest
Nov. 6 PITTSBURGH
Nov. 13 at Virginia Tech
Nov. 18 LOUISVILLE
Nov. 27 MIAMI

### FLORIDA STATE
Sept. 11 JACKSONVILLE STATE
Sept. 18 at Wake Forest
Sept. 25 LOUISVILLE
Oct. 02 SYRACUSE
Oct. 09 at North Carolina
Oct. 23 MASSACHUSETTS
Oct. 30 at Clemson
Nov. 06 NC STATE
Nov. 13 MIAMI
Nov. 20 at Boston College
Nov. 27 at Florida

### GEORGIA TECH
Sept. 4 NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Sept. 11 KENNESAW STATE
Sept. 18 at Clemson
Sept. 25 NORTH CAROLINA
Oct. 2 PITTSBURGH
Oct. 9 at Duke
Oct. 23 at Virginia
Oct. 30 VIRGINIA TECH
Nov. 6 at Miami
Nov. 13 BOSTON COLLEGE
Nov. 20 at Notre Dame
Nov. 27 GEORGIA

### LOUISVILLE
Sept. 6 vs. Mississippi (Atlanta, GA)
Sept. 11 EASTERN KENTUCKY
Sept. 17 UCF
Sept. 25 at Florida State
Oct. 2 at Wake Forest
Oct. 9 VIRGINIA
Oct. 23 BOSTON COLLEGE
Oct. 30 at NC State
Nov. 6 CLEMSON
Nov. 13 SYRACUSE
Nov. 18 at Duke
Nov. 27 KENTUCKY

### MIAMI
Sept. 4 vs. Alabama (Atlanta, GA)
Sept. 11 APPALACHIAN STATE
Sept. 18 MICHIGAN STATE
Sept. 25 CENTRAL CONNECTICUT ST.
Sept. 30 VIRGINIA
Oct. 16 at North Carolina
Oct. 23 NC STATE
Oct. 30 at Pittsburgh
Nov. 6 GEORGIA TECH
Nov. 13 at Florida State
Nov. 20 VIRGINIA TECH
Nov. 27 at Duke

### NC STATE
Sept. 2 SOUTH FLORIDA
Sept. 11 at Mississippi State
Sept. 18 FURMAN
Sept. 25 CLEMSON
Oct. 2 LOUISIANA TECH
Oct. 16 at Boston College
Oct. 23 at Miami
Oct. 30 LOUISVILLE
Nov. 6 at Florida State
Nov. 13 at Wake Forest
Nov. 20 SYRACUSE
Nov. 26 NORTH CAROLINA

### NORTH CAROLINA
Sept. 2 at Virginia Tech
Sept. 11 GEORGIA STATE
Sept. 18 VIRGINIA
Sept. 25 at Georgia Tech
Oct. 2 DUKE
Oct. 9 FLORIDA STATE
Oct. 16 MIAMI
Oct. 30 at Notre Dame
Nov. 6 WAKE FOREST
Nov. 11 at Pittsburgh
Nov. 20 WOFFORD
Nov. 26 at NC State

### PITTSBURGH
Sept. 4 MASSACHUSETTS
Sept. 11 at Tennessee
Sept. 18 WESTERN MICHIGAN
Sept. 25 NEW HAMPSHIRE
Oct. 2 at Georgia Tech
Oct. 16 at Virginia Tech
Oct. 23 CLEMSON
Oct. 30 MIAMI
Nov. 6 at Duke
Nov. 11 NORTH CAROLINA
Nov. 20 VIRGINIA
Nov. 27 at Syracuse

### SYRACUSE
Sept. 4 at Ohio
Sept. 11 RUTGERS
Sept. 18 UALBANY
Sept. 24 LIBERTY
Oct. 2 at Florida State
Oct. 9 WAKE FOREST
Oct. 15 CLEMSON
Oct. 23 at Virginia Tech
Oct. 30 BOSTON COLLEGE
Nov. 13 at Louisville
Nov. 20 at NC State
Nov. 27 PITTSBURGH

### VIRGINIA
Sept. 4 WILLIAM & MARY
Sept. 11 ILLINOIS
Sept. 18 at North Carolina
Sept. 24 WAKE FOREST
Sept. 30 at Miami
Oct. 9 at Louisville
Oct. 16 DUKE
Oct. 23 GEORGIA TECH
Oct. 30 at BYU
Nov. 13 NOTRE DAME
Nov. 20 at Pittsburgh
Nov. 27 VIRGINIA TECH

### VIRGINIA TECH
Sept. 2 NORTH CAROLINA
Sept. 11 MIDDLE TENNESSEE
Sept. 18 at West Virginia
Sept. 25 RICHMOND
Oct. 9 NOTRE DAME
Oct. 16 PITTSBURGH
Oct. 23 SYRACUSE
Oct. 30 at Georgia Tech
Nov. 5 at Boston College
Nov. 13 DUKE
Nov. 20 at Miami
Nov. 27 at Virginia

### WAKE FOREST
Sept. 3 OLD DOMINION
Sept. 11 NORFOLK STATE
Sept. 18 FLORIDA STATE
Sept. 24 at Virginia
Oct. 2 LOUISVILLE
Oct. 9 at Syracuse
Oct. 23 at Army
Oct. 30 DUKE
Nov. 6 at North Carolina
Nov. 13 NC STATE
Nov. 20 at Clemson
Nov. 27 at Boston College

## BIG TEN

### ILLINOIS
Aug. 28 NEBRASKA
Sept. 4 UTSA
Sept. 11 at Virginia
Sept. 18 MARYLAND
Sept. 25 at Purdue
Oct. 2 CHARLOTTE
Oct. 9 WISCONSIN
Oct. 23 at Penn State
Oct. 30 RUTGERS
Nov. 6 at Minnesota
Nov. 20 at Iowa
Nov. 27 NORTHWESTERN

### INDIANA
Sept. 4 at Iowa
Sept. 11 IDAHO
Sept. 18 CINCINNATI
Sept. 25 at Western Kentucky
Oct. 2 at Penn State
Oct. 16 MICHIGAN STATE
Oct. 23 OHIO STATE
Oct. 30 at Maryland
Nov. 6 at Michigan
Nov. 13 RUTGERS
Nov. 20 MINNESOTA
Nov. 27 at Purdue

### IOWA
Sept. 4 INDIANA
Sept. 11 at Iowa State
Sept. 18 KENT STATE
Sept. 25 COLORADO STATE
Oct. 2 at Maryland
Oct. 9 PENN STATE
Oct. 16 PURDUE
Oct. 30 at Wisconsin
Nov. 6 at Northwestern
Nov. 13 MINNESOTA
Nov. 20 ILLINOIS
Nov. 26 at Nebraska

### MARYLAND
Sept. 4 WEST VIRGINIA
Sept. 11 HOWARD UNIVERSITY
Sept. 18 at Illinois
Sept. 25 KENT STATE
Oct. 2 IOWA
Oct. 9 at Ohio State
Oct. 23 at Minnesota
Oct. 30 INDIANA
Nov. 6 PENN STATE
Nov. 13 at Michigan State
Nov. 20 MICHIGAN
Nov. 27 at Rutgers

### MICHIGAN
Sept. 4 WESTERN MICHIGAN
Sept. 11 WASHINGTON
Sept. 18 NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Sept. 25 RUTGERS
Oct. 2 at Wisconsin
Oct. 9 at Nebraska
Oct. 23 NORTHWESTERN
Oct. 30 at Michigan State
Nov. 6 INDIANA
Nov. 13 at Penn State
Nov. 20 at Maryland
Nov. 27 OHIO STATE

### MICHIGAN STATE
Sept. 4 at Northwestern
Sept. 11 YOUNGSTOWN STATE
Sept. 18 at Miami
Sept. 25 NEBRASKA
Oct. 2 WESTERN KENTUCKY
Oct. 9 at Rutgers
Oct. 16 at Indiana
Oct. 30 MICHIGAN
Nov. 6 at Purdue
Nov. 13 MARYLAND
Nov. 20 at Ohio State
Nov. 27 PENN STATE

### MINNESOTA
Sept. 2 OHIO STATE
Sept. 11 MIAMI (OH)
Sept. 18 at Colorado
Sept. 25 BOWLING GREEN
Oct. 2 at Purdue
Oct. 16 NEBRASKA
Oct. 23 MARYLAND
Oct. 30 at Northwestern
Nov. 6 ILLINOIS
Nov. 13 at Iowa
Nov. 20 at Indiana
Nov. 27 WISCONSIN

### NEBRASKA
Aug. 28 at Illinois
Sept. 11 BUFFALO
Sept. 18 at Oklahoma
Sept. 25 at Michigan State
Oct. 2 NORTHWESTERN
Oct. 9 MICHIGAN
Oct. 16 at Minnesota
Oct. 30 PURDUE
Nov. 6 OHIO STATE
Nov. 13 S.E. LOUISIANA
Nov. 20 at Wisconsin
Nov. 26 IOWA

### NORTHWESTERN
Sept. 4 MICHIGAN STATE
Sept. 11 INDIANA STATE
Sept. 18 at Duke
Sept. 25 OHIO
Oct. 2 at Nebraska
Oct. 16 RUTGERS
Oct. 23 at Michigan
Oct. 30 MINNESOTA
Nov. 6 IOWA
Nov. 13 at Wisconsin
Nov. 20 vs. Purdue (Chicago, IL)
Nov. 27 at Illinois

### OHIO STATE
Sept. 2 at Minnesota
Sept. 11 OREGON
Sept. 18 TULSA
Sept. 25 AKRON
Oct. 2 at Rutgers
Oct. 9 MARYLAND
Oct. 23 at Indiana
Oct. 30 PENN STATE
Nov. 6 at Nebraska
Nov. 13 PURDUE
Nov. 20 MICHIGAN STATE
Nov. 27 at Michigan

### PENN STATE
Sept. 4 at Wisconsin
Sept. 11 BALL STATE
Sept. 18 AUBURN
Sept. 25 VILLANOVA
Oct. 2 INDIANA
Oct. 9 at Iowa
Oct. 23 ILLINOIS
Oct. 30 at Ohio State
Nov. 6 at Maryland
Nov. 13 MICHIGAN
Nov. 20 RUTGERS
Nov. 27 at Michigan State

### PURDUE
Sept. 4 OREGON STATE
Sept. 11 at Connecticut
Sept. 18 at Notre Dame
Sept. 25 ILLINOIS
Oct. 2 MINNESOTA
Oct. 16 at Iowa
Oct. 23 WISCONSIN
Oct. 30 at Nebraska
Nov. 6 MICHIGAN STATE
Nov. 13 at Ohio State
Nov. 20 at Northwestern
Nov. 27 INDIANA

### RUTGERS
Sept. 4 TEMPLE
Sept. 11 at Syracuse
Sept. 18 DELAWARE
Sept. 25 at Michigan
Oct. 2 OHIO STATE
Oct. 9 MICHIGAN STATE
Oct. 16 at Northwestern
Oct. 30 at Illinois
Nov. 6 WISCONSIN
Nov. 13 at Indiana
Nov. 20 at Penn State
Nov. 27 MARYLAND

### WISCONSIN
Sept. 4 PENN STATE
Sept. 11 EASTERN MICHIGAN
Sept. 25 vs. Notre Dame (Chicago, IL)
Oct. 2 MICHIGAN
Oct. 9 at Illinois
Oct. 16 ARMY
Oct. 23 at Purdue
Oct. 30 IOWA
Nov. 6 at Rutgers
Nov. 13 NORTHWESTERN
Nov. 20 NEBRASKA
Nov. 27 at Minnesota

## BIG 12

### BAYLOR
Sept. 4 at Texas State
Sept. 11 TEXAS SOUTHERN
Sept. 18 at Kansas
Sept. 25 IOWA STATE
Oct. 2 at Oklahoma State
Oct. 9 WEST VIRGINIA
Oct. 16 BYU
Oct. 30 TEXAS
Nov. 6 at TCU
Nov. 13 OKLAHOMA
Nov. 20 at Kansas State
Nov. 27 TEXAS TECH

### IOWA STATE
Sept. 4 NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Sept. 11 IOWA
Sept. 18 at UNLV
Sept. 25 at Baylor
Oct. 2 KANSAS
Oct. 16 at Kansas State
Oct. 23 OKLAHOMA STATE
Oct. 30 at West Virginia
Nov. 6 TEXAS
Nov. 13 at Texas Tech
Nov. 20 at Oklahoma
Nov. 27 TCU

### KANSAS
Sept. 4 SOUTH DAKOTA
Sept. 11 at Coastal Carolina
Sept. 18 BAYLOR
Sept. 25 at Duke
Oct. 2 at Iowa State
Oct. 16 TEXAS TECH
Oct. 23 OKLAHOMA
Oct. 30 at Oklahoma State
Nov. 6 KANSAS STATE
Nov. 13 at Texas
Nov. 20 at TCU
Nov. 27 WEST VIRGINIA

### KANSAS STATE
Sept. 4 vs. Stanford (Arlington, TX)
Sept. 11 SOUTHERN ILLINOIS
Sept. 18 NEVADA
Sept. 25 at Oklahoma State
Oct. 2 OKLAHOMA
Oct. 16 IOWA STATE
Oct. 23 at Texas Tech
Oct. 30 TCU
Nov. 6 at Kansas
Nov. 13 WEST VIRGINIA
Nov. 20 BAYLOR
Nov. 27 at Texas

# NATIONAL SCHEDULES

### OKLAHOMA
Sept. 4 at Tulane
Sept. 11 WESTERN CAROLINA
Sept. 18 NEBRASKA
Sept. 25 WEST VIRGINIA
Oct. 2 at Kansas State
Oct. 9 vs. Texas (Dallas, TX)
Oct. 16 TCU
Oct. 23 at Kansas
Oct. 30 TEXAS TECH
Nov. 13 at Baylor
Nov. 20 IOWA STATE
Nov. 27 at Oklahoma State

### OKLAHOMA STATE
Sept. 4 MISSOURI STATE
Sept. 11 TULSA
Sept. 18 at Boise State
Sept. 25 KANSAS STATE
Oct. 2 BAYLOR
Oct. 16 at Texas
Oct. 23 at Iowa State
Oct. 30 KANSAS
Nov. 6 at West Virginia
Nov. 13 TCU
Nov. 20 at Texas Tech
Nov. 27 OKLAHOMA

### TCU
Sept. 4 DUQUESNE
Sept. 11 CALIFORNIA
Sept. 25 SMU
Oct. 2 TEXAS
Oct. 9 at Texas Tech
Oct. 16 at Oklahoma
Oct. 23 WEST VIRGINIA
Oct. 30 at Kansas State
Nov. 6 BAYLOR
Nov. 13 at Oklahoma State
Nov. 20 KANSAS
Nov. 27 at Iowa State

### TEXAS
Sept. 4 LOUISIANA
Sept. 11 at Arkansas
Sept. 18 RICE
Sept. 25 TEXAS TECH
Oct. 2 at TCU
Oct. 9 vs. Oklahoma (Dallas, TX)
Oct. 16 OKLAHOMA STATE
Oct. 30 at Baylor
Nov. 6 at Iowa State
Nov. 13 KANSAS
Nov. 20 at West Virginia
Nov. 27 KANSAS STATE

### TEXAS TECH
Sept. 2 vs. Houston (Houston, TX)
Sept. 11 STEPHEN F. AUSTIN
Sept. 18 FIU
Sept. 25 at Texas
Oct. 2 at West Virginia
Oct. 9 TCU
Oct. 16 at Kansas
Oct. 23 KANSAS STATE
Oct. 30 at Oklahoma
Nov. 13 IOWA STATE
Nov. 20 OKLAHOMA STATE
Nov. 27 at Baylor

### WEST VIRGINIA
Sept. 4 at Maryland
Sept. 11 LONG ISLAND
Sept. 18 VIRGINIA TECH
Sept. 25 at Oklahoma
Oct. 2 TEXAS TECH
Oct. 9 at Baylor
Oct. 23 at TCU
Oct. 30 IOWA STATE
Nov. 6 OKLAHOMA STATE
Nov. 13 at Kansas State
Nov. 20 TEXAS
Nov. 27 at Kansas

## C-USA

### CHARLOTTE
Sept. 4 DUKE
Sept. 11 GARDNER-WEBB
Sept. 18 at Georgia State
Sept. 25 MIDDLE TENNESSEE
Oct. 2 at Illinois
Oct. 9 at FIU
Oct. 23 FAU
Oct. 30 at Western Kentucky
Nov. 6 RICE
Nov. 13 at Louisiana Tech
Nov. 20 MARSHALL
Nov. 27 at Old Dominion

### FLORIDA ATLANTIC (FAU)
Sept. 4 at Florida
Sept. 11 GEORGIA SOUTHERN
Sept. 18 FORDHAM
Sept. 25 at Air Force
Oct. 2 FIU
Oct. 9 at UAB
Oct. 23 at Charlotte
Oct. 30 UTEP
Nov. 6 MARSHALL
Nov. 13 at Old Dominion
Nov. 20 at Western Kentucky
Nov. 27 MIDDLE TENNESSEE

### FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL (FIU)
Sept. 2 LONG ISLAND
Sept. 11 TEXAS STATE
Sept. 18 at Texas Tech
Sept. 25 at Central Michigan
Oct. 2 at FAU
Oct. 9 CHARLOTTE
Oct. 23 WESTERN KENTUCKY
Oct. 30 at Marshall
Nov. 6 OLD DOMINION
Nov. 13 at Middle Tennessee
Nov. 20 NORTH TEXAS
Nov. 27 at Southern Miss

### LOUISIANA TECH
Sept. 4 at Mississippi State
Sept. 11 S.E. LOUISIANA
Sept. 18 SMU
Sept. 25 NORTH TEXAS
Oct. 2 at NC State
Oct. 16 at UTEP
Oct. 23 UTSA
Oct. 30 at Old Dominion
Nov. 6 at UAB
Nov. 13 CHARLOTTE
Nov. 20 SOUTHERN MISS
Nov. 27 at Rice

### MARSHALL
Sept. 4 at Navy
Sept. 11 N.C. CENTRAL
Sept. 18 EAST CAROLINA
Sept. 23 at Appalachian State
Oct. 2 at Middle Tennessee
Oct. 9 OLD DOMINION
Oct. 16 at North Texas
Oct. 30 FIU
Nov. 6 at FAU
Nov. 13 UAB
Nov. 20 at Charlotte
Nov. 27 WESTERN KENTUCKY

### MIDDLE TENNESSEE
Sept. 4 MONMOUTH
Sept. 11 at Virginia Tech
Sept. 18 at UTSA
Sept. 25 at Charlotte
Oct. 2 MARSHALL
Oct. 9 at Liberty
Oct. 23 at Connecticut
Oct. 30 SOUTHERN MISS
Nov. 6 at Western Kentucky
Nov. 13 FIU
Nov. 20 OLD DOMINION
Nov. 27 at FAU

### NORTH TEXAS
Sept. 4 NORTHWESTERN STATE
Sept. 11 at SMU
Sept. 18 UAB
Sept. 25 at Louisiana Tech
Oct. 9 at Missouri
Oct. 16 MARSHALL
Oct. 23 LIBERTY
Oct. 30 at Rice
Nov. 6 at Southern Miss
Nov. 13 UTEP
Nov. 20 at FIU
Nov. 27 UTSA

### OLD DOMINION
Sept. 3 at Wake Forest
Sept. 11 HAMPTON
Sept. 18 at Liberty
Sept. 25 BUFFALO
Oct. 2 at UTEP
Oct. 9 at Marshall
Oct. 16 WESTERN KENTUCKY
Oct. 30 LOUISIANA TECH
Nov. 6 at FIU
Nov. 13 FAU
Nov. 20 at Middle Tennessee
Nov. 27 CHARLOTTE

### RICE
Sept. 4 at Arkansas
Sept. 11 HOUSTON
Sept. 18 at Texas
Sept. 25 TEXAS SOUTHERN
Oct. 2 SOUTHERN MISS
Oct. 16 at UTSA
Oct. 23 at UAB
Oct. 30 NORTH TEXAS
Nov. 6 at Charlotte
Nov. 13 WESTERN KENTUCKY
Nov. 20 at UTEP
Nov. 27 LOUISIANA TECH

### SOUTHERM MISS
Sept. 4 at South Alabama
Sept. 11 GRAMBLING STATE
Sept. 18 TROY
Sept. 25 at Alabama
Oct. 2 at Rice
Oct. 9 UTEP
Oct. 16 UAB
Oct. 30 at Middle Tennessee
Nov. 6 NORTH TEXAS
Nov. 13 at UTSA
Nov. 20 at Louisiana Tech
Nov. 27 FIU

### UAB
Sept. 1 vs. Jacksonville St. (Mont., AL)
Sept. 11 at Georgia
Sept. 18 at North Texas
Sept. 25 at Tulane
Oct. 2 LIBERTY
Oct. 9 FAU
Oct. 16 at Southern Miss
Oct. 23 RICE
Nov. 6 LOUISIANA TECH
Nov. 13 at Marshall
Nov. 20 at UTSA
Nov. 27 UTEP

### UTEP
Aug. 28 at New Mexico State
Sept. 4 BETHUNE-COOKMAN
Sept. 11 at Boise State
Sept. 25 NEW MEXICO
Oct. 2 OLD DOMINION
Oct. 9 at Southern Miss
Oct. 16 LOUISIANA TECH
Oct. 30 at FAU
Nov. 6 UTSA
Nov. 13 at North Texas
Nov. 20 RICE
Nov. 27 at UAB

### UTSA
Sept. 4 at Illinois
Sept. 11 LAMAR
Sept. 18 MIDDLE TENNESSEE
Sept. 25 at Memphis
Oct. 2 UNLV
Oct. 9 at Western Kentucky
Oct. 16 RICE
Oct. 23 at Louisiana Tech
Nov. 6 at UTEP
Nov. 13 SOUTHERN MISS
Nov. 20 UAB
Nov. 27 at North Texas

### WESTERN KENTUCKY
Sept. 2 UT MARTIN
Sept. 11 at Army
Sept. 25 INDIANA
Oct. 2 at Michigan State
Oct. 9 UTSA
Oct. 16 at Old Dominion
Oct. 23 at FIU
Oct. 30 CHARLOTTE
Nov. 6 MIDDLE TENNESSEE
Nov. 13 at Rice
Nov. 20 FAU
Nov. 27 at Marshall

## I-A INDEPENDENTS

### ARMY WEST POINT
Sept. 4 at Georgia State
Sept. 11 WESTERN KENTUCKY
Sept. 18 CONNECTICUT
Sept. 25 MIAMI (OH)
Oct. 2 at Ball State
Oct. 16 at Wisconsin
Oct. 23 WAKE FOREST
Nov. 6 vs. Air Force (Arlington, TX)
Nov. 13 BUCKNELL
Nov. 20 MASSACHUSETTS
Nov. 27 at Liberty
Dec. 11 vs. Navy (East Rutherford, NJ)

### BYU
Sept. 4 vs. Arizona (Las Vegas, NV)
Sept. 11 UTAH
Sept. 18 ARIZONA STATE
Sept. 25 SOUTH FLORIDA
Oct. 1 at Utah State
Oct. 9 BOISE STATE
Oct. 16 at Baylor
Oct. 23 at Washington State
Oct. 30 VIRGINIA
Nov. 6 IDAHO STATE
Nov. 20 at Georgia Southern
Nov. 27 at USC

### CONNECTICUT
Aug. 28 at Fresno State
Sept. 4 HOLY CROSS
Sept. 11 PURDUE
Sept. 18 at Army
Sept. 25 WYOMING
Oct. 2 at Vanderbilt
Oct. 9 at Massachusetts
Oct. 16 YALE
Oct. 23 MIDDLE TENNESSEE
Nov. 13 at Clemson
Nov. 20 at UCF
Nov. 27 HOUSTON

### LIBERTY
Sept. 4 CAMPBELL
Sept. 11 at Troy
Sept. 18 OLD DOMINION
Sept. 24 at Syracuse
Oct. 2 at UAB
Oct. 9 MIDDLE TENNESSEE
Oct. 16 at ULM
Oct. 23 at North Texas
Oct. 30 MASSACHUSETTS
Nov. 6 at Ole Miss
Nov. 20 LOUISIANA
Nov. 27 ARMY

### MASSACHUSETTS
Sept. 4 at Pittsburgh
Sept. 11 BOSTON COLLEGE
Sept. 18 EASTERN MICHIGAN
Sept. 25 at Coastal Carolina
Oct. 2 TOLEDO
Oct. 9 CONNECTICUT
Oct. 23 at Florida State
Oct. 30 at Liberty
Nov. 6 RHODE ISLAND
Nov. 13 MAINE
Nov. 20 at Army
Nov. 27 at New Mexico State

### NEW MEXICO STATE
Aug. 28 UTEP
Sept. 4 at San Diego State
Sept. 11 at New Mexico
Sept. 18 SOUTH CAROLINA STATE
Sept. 25 HAWAII
Oct. 2 at San Jose State
Oct. 9 at Nevada
Oct. 23 at Hawaii
Nov. 6 UTAH STATE
Nov. 13 at Alabama
Nov. 20 at Kentucky
Nov. 27 MASSACHUSETTS

### NOTRE DAME
Sept. 5 Florida State
Sept. 11 TOLEDO
Sept. 18 PURDUE
Sept. 25 vs. Wisconsin (Chicago, IL)
Oct. 2 CINCINNATI
Oct. 9 Virginia Tech
Oct. 23 USC
Oct. 30 NORTH CAROLINA
Nov. 6 NAVY
Nov. 13 Virginia
Nov. 20 GEORGIA TECH
Nov. 27 Stanford

## MAC

### AKRON
Sept. 4 at Auburn
Sept. 11 TEMPLE
Sept. 18 BRYANT
Sept. 25 at Ohio State
Oct. 2 OHIO
Oct. 9 at Bowling Green
Oct. 16 at Miami (OH)
Oct. 23 BUFFALO
Nov. 2 BALL STATE
Nov. 9 at Western Michigan
Nov. 20 KENT STATE
Nov. 27 at Toledo

### BALL STATE
Sept. 2 WESTERN ILLINOIS
Sept. 11 at Penn State
Sept. 18 at Wyoming
Sept. 25 TOLEDO
Oct. 2 ARMY
Oct. 9 at Western Michigan
Oct. 16 at Eastern Michigan
Oct. 23 MIAMI (OHIO)
Nov. 2 at Akron
Nov. 10 at Northern Illinois
Nov. 17 CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Nov. 23 BUFFALO

### BOWLING GREEN
Sept. 4 at Tennessee
Sept. 11 SOUTH ALABAMA
Sept. 18 MURRAY STATE
Sept. 25 at Minnesota
Oct. 2 at Kent State
Oct. 9 AKRON
Oct. 16 at Northern Illinois
Oct. 23 EASTERN MICHIGAN
Oct. 30 at Buffalo
Nov. 10 TOLEDO
Nov. 16 at Miami (OH)
Nov. 26 OHIO

### BUFFALO
Sept. 2 WAGNER
Sept. 11 at Nebraska
Sept. 18 COASTAL CAROLINA
Sept. 25 at Old Dominion
Oct. 2 WESTERN MICHIGAN
Oct. 9 at Kent State
Oct. 16 OHIO
Oct. 23 at Akron
Oct. 30 BOWLING GREEN
Nov. 9 at Miami (OH)
Nov. 17 NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Nov. 23 at Ball State

### CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Sept. 4 at Missouri
Sept. 11 ROBERT MORRIS
Sept. 18 at LSU
Sept. 25 FIU
Oct. 2 at Miami (OH)
Oct. 9 at Ohio
Oct. 16 TOLEDO
Oct. 23 NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Nov. 3 at Western Michigan
Nov. 10 KENT STATE
Nov. 17 at Ball State
Nov. 26 EASTERN MICHIGAN

### EASTERN MICHIGAN
Sept. 3 SAINT FRANCIS (PA)
Sept. 11 at Wisconsin
Sept. 18 at Massachusetts
Sept. 25 TEXAS STATE
Oct. 2 at Northern Illinois
Oct. 9 MIAMI
Oct. 16 BALL STATE
Oct. 23 at Bowling Green
Nov. 2 at Toledo
Nov. 9 OHIO
Nov. 16 WESTERN MICHIGAN
Nov. 26 at Central Michigan

### KENT STATE
Sept. 4 at Texas A&M
Sept. 11 VMI
Sept. 18 at Iowa
Sept. 25 at Maryland
Oct. 2 BOWLING GREEN
Oct. 9 BUFFALO
Oct. 16 at Western Michigan
Oct. 23 at Ohio
Nov. 3 NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Nov. 10 at Central Michigan
Nov. 20 AKRON
Nov. 27 MIAMI (OH)

### MIAMI (OH)
Sept. 4 at Cincinnati
Sept. 11 at Minnesota
Sept. 18 LIU POST
Sept. 25 at Army
Oct. 2 CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Oct. 9 at Eastern Michigan
Oct. 16 AKRON
Oct. 23 at Ball State
Nov. 2 at Ohio
Nov. 9 BUFFALO
Nov. 16 BOWLING GREEN
Nov. 27 at Kent State

### NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Sept. 4 at Georgia Tech
Sept. 11 WYOMING
Sept. 18 at Michigan
Sept. 25 MAINE
Oct. 2 EASTERN MICHIGAN
Oct. 9 at Toledo
Oct. 16 BOWLING GREEN
Oct. 23 at Central Michigan
Nov. 3 at Kent State
Nov. 10 BALL STATE
Nov. 17 at Buffalo
Nov. 23 WESTERN MICHIGAN

### OHIO
Sept. 4 SYRACUSE
Sept. 11 DUQUESNE
Sept. 18 at Louisiana
Sept. 25 at Northwestern
Oct. 2 at Akron
Oct. 9 CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Oct. 16 at Buffalo
Oct. 23 KENT STATE
Nov. 2 MIAMI (OH)
Nov. 9 at Eastern Michigan
Nov. 16 TOLEDO
Nov. 26 at Bowling Green

### TOLEDO
Sept. 4 NORFOLK STATE
Sept. 11 at Notre Dame
Sept. 18 COLORADO STATE
Sept. 25 at Ball State
Oct. 2 at Massachusets
Oct. 9 NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Oct. 16 at Central Michigan
Oct. 23 WESTERN MICHIGAN
Nov. 2 EASTERN MICHIGAN
Nov. 10 at Bowling Green
Nov. 16 at Ohio
Nov. 27 AKRON

### WESTERN MICHIGAN
Sept. 4 at Michigan
Sept. 11 ILLINOIS STATE
Sept. 18 at Pittsburgh
Sept. 25 SAN JOSE STATE
Oct. 2 at Buffalo
Oct. 9 BALL STATE
Oct. 16 KENT STATE
Oct. 23 at Toledo
Nov. 3 CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Nov. 9 AKRON
Nov. 16 at Eastern Michigan
Nov. 23 at Northern Illinois

## MOUNTAIN WEST

### AIR FORCE
Sept. 4 LAFAYETTE
Sept. 11 at Navy
Sept. 18 UTAH STATE
Sept. 25 FAU
Oct. 2 at New Mexico
Oct. 9 WYOMING
Oct. 16 at Boise State
Oct. 23 SAN DIEGO STATE
Nov. 6 vs. Army (Arlington, TX)
Nov. 13 at Colorado State
Nov. 20 at Nevada
Nov. 27 UNLV

### BOISE STATE
Sept. 4 at UCF
Sept. 11 UTEP
Sept. 18 OKLAHOMA STATE
Sept. 25 at Utah State
Oct. 2 NEVADA
Oct. 9 at BYU
Oct. 16 AIR FORCE
Oct. 30 at Colorado State
Nov. 6 at Fresno State
Nov. 13 WYOMING
Nov. 20 NEW MEXICO
Nov. 27 at San Diego State

### COLORADO STATE
Sept. 4 SOUTH DAKOTA STATE
Sept. 11 VANDERBILT
Sept. 18 at Toledo
Sept. 25 at Iowa
Oct. 9 SAN JOSE STATE
Oct. 16 at New Mexico
Oct. 23 at Utah State
Oct. 30 BOISE STATE
Nov. 6 at Wyoming
Nov. 13 AIR FORCE
Nov. 20 at Hawaii
Nov. 27 NEVADA

### FRESNO STATE
Aug. 28 CONNECTICUT
Sept. 4 at Oregon
Sept. 11 CAL POLY
Sept. 18 at UCLA
Sept. 25 UNLV
Oct. 2 at Hawaii
Oct. 16 at Wyoming
Oct. 23 NEVADA
Oct. 30 at San Diego State
Nov. 6 BOISE STATE
Nov. 13 NEW MEXICO
Nov. 27 at San Jose State

# NATIONAL SCHEDULES

### HAWAII
Aug. 28 at UCLA
Sept. 4 PORTLAND STATE
Sept. 11 at Oregon State
Sept. 18 SAN JOSE STATE
Sept. 25 at New Mexico State
Oct. 2 FRESNO STATE
Oct. 16 at Nevada
Oct. 23 NEW MEXICO STATE
Oct. 30 at Utah State
Nov. 6 SAN DIEGO STATE
Nov. 13 at UNLV
Nov. 20 COLORADO STATE
Nov. 27 at Wyoming

### NEVADA
Sept. 4 at California
Sept. 11 IDAHO STATE
Sept. 18 at Kansas State
Oct. 2 at Boise State
Oct. 9 NEW MEXICO STATE
Oct. 16 HAWAII
Oct. 23 at Fresno State
Oct. 30 UNLV
Nov. 6 at San Jose State
Nov. 13 at San Diego State
Nov. 20 AIR FORCE
Nov. 27 at Colorado State

### NEW MEXICO
Sept. 2 HOUSTON BAPTIST
Sept. 11 NEW MEXICO STATE
Sept. 18 at Texas A&M
Sept. 25 at UTEP
Oct. 2 AIR FORCE
Oct. 9 at San Diego State
Oct. 16 COLORADO STATE
Oct. 23 at Wyoming
Nov. 6 UNLV
Nov. 13 at Fresno State
Nov. 20 at Boise State
Nov. 27 UTAH

### SAN DIEGO STATE
Sept. 4 NEW MEXICO STATE
Sept. 11 at Arizona
Sept. 18 UTAH
Sept. 25 TOWSON
Oct. 9 NEW MEXICO
Oct. 16 at San Jose State
Oct. 23 at Air Force
Oct. 30 FRESNO STATE
Nov. 6 at Hawaii
Nov. 13 NEVADA
Nov. 20 at UNLV
Nov. 27 BOISE STATE

### SAN JOSE STATE
Aug. 28 SOUTHERN UTAH
Sept. 4 at USC
Sept. 18 at Hawaii
Sept. 25 at Western Michigan
Oct. 2 NEW MEXICO STATE
Oct. 9 at Colorado State
Oct. 16 SAN DIEGO STATE
Oct. 23 at UNLV
Oct. 30 WYOMING
Nov. 6 at Nevada
Nov. 13 UTAH STATE
Nov. 27 FRESNO STATE

### UNLV
Sept. 2 EASTERN WASHINGTON
Sept. 11 at Arizona State
Sept. 18 IOWA STATE
Sept. 25 at Fresno State
Oct. 2 at UTSA
Oct. 16 UTAH STATE
Oct. 23 SAN JOSE STATE
Oct. 30 at Nevada
Nov. 6 at New Mexico
Nov. 13 HAWAII
Nov. 20 SAN DIEGO STATE
Nov. 27 at Air Force

### UTAH STATE
Sept. 4 WASHINGTON STATE
Sept. 11 NORTH DAKOTA
Sept. 18 at Air Force
Sept. 25 BOISE STATE
Oct. 1 BYU
Oct. 16 at UNLV
Oct. 23 COLORADO STATE
Oct. 30 HAWAII
Nov. 6 at New Mexico State
Nov. 13 at San José State
Nov. 20 WYOMING
Nov. 27 at New Mexico

### WYOMING
Sept. 4 MONTANA STATE
Sept. 11 at Northern Illinois
Sept. 18 BALL STATE
Sept. 25 at Connecticut
Oct. 9 at Air Force
Oct. 16 FRESNO STATE
Oct. 23 NEW MEXICO
Oct. 30 at San Jose State
Nov. 6 COLORADO STATE
Nov. 13 at Boise State
Nov. 20 at Utah State
Nov. 27 HAWAII

## PAC-12

### ARIZONA
Sept. 4 vs. BYU (Las Vegas, NV)
Sept. 11 SAN DIEGO STATE
Sept. 18 NORTHERN ARIZONA
Sept. 25 at Oregon
Oct. 9 UCLA
Oct. 16 at Colorado
Oct. 22 WASHINGTON
Oct. 30 at USC
Nov. 6 CALIFORNIA
Nov. 13 UTAH
Nov. 19 at Washington State
Nov. 27 at Arizona State

### ARIZONA STATE
Sept. 2 SOUTHERN UTAH
Sept. 11 UNLV
Sept. 18 at BYU
Sept. 25 COLORADO
Oct. 2 at UCLA
Oct. 8 STANFORD
Oct. 16 at Utah
Oct. 30 WASHINGTON STATE
Nov. 6 USC
Nov. 13 at Washington
Nov. 20 at Oregon State
Nov. 27 ARIZONA

### CALIFORNIA
Sept. 4 NEVADA
Sept. 11 at TCU
Sept. 18 SACRAMENTO STATE
Sept. 25 at Washington
Oct. 2 WASHINGTON STATE
Oct. 15 at Oregon
Oct. 23 COLORADO
Oct. 30 OREGON STATE
Nov. 6 at Arizona
Nov. 13 USC
Nov. 20 at Stanford
Nov. 27 at UCLA

### COLORADO
Sept. 3 NORTHERN COLORADO
Sept. 11 vs. Texas A&M (Denver, CO)
Sept. 18 MINNESOTA
Sept. 25 at Arizona State
Oct. 2 USC
Oct. 16 ARIZONA
Oct. 23 at California
Oct. 30 at Oregon
Nov. 6 OREGON STATE
Nov. 13 at UCLA
Nov. 20 WASHINGTON
Nov. 26 at Utah

### OREGON
Sept. 4 FRESNO STATE
Sept. 11 at Ohio State
Sept. 18 STONY BROOK
Sept. 25 ARIZONA
Oct. 2 at Stanford
Oct. 15 CALIFORNIA
Oct. 23 at UCLA
Oct. 30 COLORADO
Nov. 6 at Washington
Nov. 13 WASHINGTON STATE
Nov. 20 at Utah
Nov. 27 OREGON STATE

### OREGON STATE
Sept. 4 at Purdue
Sept. 11 HAWAII
Sept. 18 IDAHO
Sept. 25 at USC
Oct. 2 WASHINGTON
Oct. 9 at Washington State
Oct. 23 UTAH
Oct. 30 at California
Nov. 6 at Colorado
Nov. 13 STANFORD
Nov. 20 ARIZONA STATE
Nov. 27 at Oregon

### STANFORD
Sept. 4 vs. Kansas State (Arlington, TX)
Sept. 11 at USC
Sept. 18 at Vanderbilt
Sept. 25 UCLA
Oct. 2 OREGON
Oct. 8 at Arizona State
Oct. 16 at Washington State
Oct. 30 WASHINGTON
Nov. 5 UTAH
Nov. 13 at Oregon State
Nov. 20 CALIFORNIA
Nov. 27 NOTRE DAME

### UCLA
Aug. 28 HAWAII
Sept. 4 LSU
Sept. 18 FRESNO STATE
Sept. 25 at Stanford
Oct. 2 ARIZONA STATE
Oct. 9 at Arizona
Oct. 16 at Washington
Oct. 23 OREGON
Oct. 30 at Utah
Nov. 13 COLORADO
Nov. 20 at USC
Nov. 27 CALIFORNIA

### USC
Sept. 4 SAN JOSE STATE
Sept. 11 STANFORD
Sept. 18 at Washington State
Sept. 25 OREGON STATE
Oct. 2 at Colorado
Oct. 9 UTAH
Oct. 23 at Notre Dame
Oct. 30 ARIZONA
Nov. 6 at Arizona State
Nov. 13 at California
Nov. 20 UCLA
Nov. 27 BYU

### UTAH
Sept. 2 WEBER STATE
Sept. 11 at BYU
Sept. 18 at San Diego State
Sept. 25 WASHINGTON STATE
Oct. 9 at USC
Oct. 16 ARIZONA STATE
Oct. 23 at Oregon State
Oct. 30 UCLA
Nov. 5 at Stanford
Nov. 13 at Arizona
Nov. 20 OREGON
Nov. 26 COLORADO

### WASHINGTON
Sept. 4 MONTANA
Sept. 11 at Michigan
Sept. 18 ARKANSAS STATE
Sept. 25 CALIFORNIA
Oct. 2 at Oregon State
Oct. 16 UCLA
Oct. 22 at Arizona
Oct. 30 at Stanford
Nov. 6 OREGON
Nov. 13 ARIZONA STATE
Nov. 20 at Colorado
Nov. 26 WASHINGTON STATE

### WASHINGTON STATE
Sept. 4 UTAH STATE
Sept. 11 PORTLAND STATE
Sept. 18 USC
Sept. 25 at Utah
Oct. 2 at California
Oct. 9 OREGON STATE
Oct. 16 STANFORD
Oct. 23 BYU
Oct. 30 at Arizona State
Nov. 13 at Oregon
Nov. 19 ARIZONA
Nov. 26 at Washington

## SEC

### ALABAMA
Sept. 4 vs. Miami (Atlanta, GA)
Sept. 11 MERCER
Sept. 18 at Florida
Sept. 25 SOUTHERN MISS
Oct. 2 OLE MISS
Oct. 9 at Texas A&M
Oct. 16 at Mississippi State
Oct. 23 TENNESSEE
Nov. 6 LSU
Nov. 13 NEW MEXICO STATE
Nov. 20 ARKANSAS
Nov. 27 at Auburn

### ARKANSAS
Sept. 4 RICE
Sept. 11 TEXAS
Sept. 18 GEORGIA SOUTHERN
Sept. 25 vs. Texas A&M (Arlington, TX)
Oct. 2 at Georgia
Oct. 9 at Ole Miss
Oct. 16 AUBURN
Oct. 23 vs. UAPB (Little Rock, AK)
Nov. 6 MISSISSIPPI STATE
Nov. 13 at LSU
Nov. 20 at Alabama
Nov. 26 MISSOURI

### AUBURN
Sept. 4 AKRON
Sept. 11 ALABAMA STATE
Sept. 18 at Penn State
Sept. 25 GEORGIA STATE
Oct. 2 at LSU
Oct. 9 GEORGIA
Oct. 16 at Arkansas
Oct. 30 OLE MISS
Nov. 6 at Texas A&M
Nov. 13 MISSISSIPPI STATE
Nov. 20 at South Carolina
Nov. 27 ALABAMA

### FLORIDA
Sept. 4 FLORIDA ATLANTIC
Sept. 11 at South Florida
Sept. 18 ALABAMA
Sept. 25 TENNESSEE
Oct. 2 at Kentucky
Oct. 9 VANDERBILT
Oct. 16 at LSU
Oct. 30 vs. Georgia (Jacksonville, FL)
Nov. 6 at South Carolina
Nov. 13 SAMFORD
Nov. 20 at Missouri
Nov. 27 FLORIDA STATE

### GEORGIA
Sept. 4 vs. Clemson (Charlotte, NC)
Sept. 11 UAB
Sept. 18 SOUTH CAROLINA
Sept. 25 at Vanderbilt
Oct. 2 ARKANSAS
Oct. 9 at Auburn
Oct. 16 at Kentucky
Oct. 30 vs. Florida (Jacksonville, FL)
Nov. 6 MISSOURI
Nov. 13 at Tennessee
Nov. 20 CHARLESTON SOUTHERN
Nov. 27 at Georgia Tech

### KENTUCKY
Sept. 4 LOUISIANA-MONROE
Sept. 11 MISSOURI
Sept. 18 UT CHATTANOOGA
Sept. 25 at South Carolina
Oct. 2 FLORIDA
Oct. 9 LSU
Oct. 16 at Georgia
Oct. 30 at Mississippi State
Nov. 6 TENNESSEE
Nov. 13 at Vanderbilt
Nov. 20 NEW MEXICO STATE
Nov. 27 at Louisville

### LSU
Sept. 4 at UCLA
Sept. 11 McNEESE STATE
Sept. 18 CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Sept. 25 at Mississippi State
Oct. 2 AUBURN
Oct. 9 at Kentucky
Oct. 16 FLORIDA
Oct. 23 at Ole Miss
Nov. 6 at Alabama
Nov. 13 ARKANSAS
Nov. 20 LOUISIANA-MONROE
Nov. 27 TEXAS A&M

### OLE MISS
Sept. 6 vs. Louisville (Atlanta, GA)
Sept. 11 AUSTIN PEAY
Sept. 18 TULANE
Oct. 2 at Alabama
Oct. 9 ARKANSAS
Oct. 16 at Tennessee
Oct. 23 LSU
Oct. 30 at Auburn
Nov. 6 LIBERTY
Nov. 13 TEXAS A&M
Nov. 20 VANDERBILT
Nov. 25 at Mississippi State

### MISSISSIPPI STATE
Sept. 4 Louisiana Tech
Sept. 11 NC STATE
Sept. 18 at Memphis
Sept. 25 LSU
Oct. 2 at Texas A&M
Oct. 16 ALABAMA
Oct. 23 at Vanderbilt
Oct. 30 KENTUCKY
Nov. 6 at Arkansas
Nov. 13 at Auburn
Nov. 20 TENNESSEE STATE
Nov. 25 OLE MISS

### MISSOURI
Sept. 4 CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Sept. 11 at Kentucky
Sept. 18 S.E. MISSOURI STATE
Sept. 25 at Boston College
Oct. 2 TENNESSEE
Oct. 9 NORTH TEXAS
Oct. 16 TEXAS A&M
Oct. 30 at Vanderbilt
Nov. 6 at Georgia
Nov. 13 SOUTH CAROLINA
Nov. 20 FLORIDA
Nov. 26 at Arkansas

### SOUTH CAROLINA
Sept. 4 EASTERN ILLINOIS
Sept. 11 at East Carolina
Sept. 18 at Georgia
Sept. 25 KENTUCKY
Oct. 2 TROY
Oct. 9 at Tennessee
Oct. 16 VANDERBILT
Oct. 23 at Texas A&M
Nov. 6 FLORIDA
Nov. 13 at Missouri
Nov. 20 AUBURN
Nov. 27 CLEMSON

### TENNESSEE
Sept. 4 BOWLING GREEN
Sept. 11 PITTSBURGH
Sept. 18 TENNESSEE TECH
Sept. 25 at Florida
Oct. 2 at Missouri
Oct. 9 SOUTH CAROLINA
Oct. 16 OLE MISS
Oct. 23 at Alabama
Nov. 6 at Kentucky
Nov. 13 GEORGIA
Nov. 20 SOUTH ALABAMA
Nov. 27 VANDERBILT

### TEXAS A&M
Sept. 4 KENT STATE
Sept. 11 at Colorado
Sept. 18 NEW MEXICO
Sept. 25 vs. Arkansas (Arlington, TX)
Oct. 2 MISSISSIPPI STATE
Oct. 9 ALABAMA
Oct. 16 at Missouri
Oct. 23 SOUTH CAROLINA
Nov. 6 AUBURN
Nov. 13 at Ole Miss
Nov. 20 PRAIRIE VIEW A&M
Nov. 27 at LSU

### VANDY
Sept. 4 EAST TENNESSEE STATE
Sept. 11 at Colorado State
Sept. 18 STANFORD
Sept. 25 GEORGIA
Oct. 2 CONNECTICUT
Oct. 9 at Florida
Oct. 16 at South Carolina
Oct. 23 MISSISSIPPI STATE
Oct. 30 MISSOURI
Nov. 13 KENTUCKY
Nov. 20 at Ole Miss
Nov. 27 at Tennessee

## SUN BELT

### APPALACHIAN STATE
Sept. 2 vs. East Carolina (Charlotte, NC)
Sept. 11 at Miami
Sept. 18 ELON
Sept. 23 MARSHALL
Oct. 2 at Georgia State
Oct. 12 at Louisiana
Oct. 20 COASTAL CAROLINA
Oct. 30 LOUISIANA-MONROE
Nov. 6 at Arkansas State
Nov. 13 SOUTH ALABAMA
Nov. 20 at Troy
Nov. 27 GEORGIA SOUTHERN

### ARKANSAS STATE
Sept. 4 CENTRAL ARKANSAS
Sept. 11 MEMPHIS
Sept. 18 at Washington
Sept. 25 at Tulsa
Oct. 2 at Georgia Southern
Oct. 7 COASTAL CAROLINA
Oct. 21 LOUISIANA
Oct. 30 at South Alabama
Nov. 6 APPALACHIAN STATE
Nov. 13 at Louisiana-Monroe
Nov. 20 at Georgia State
Nov. 27 TEXAS STATE

### COASTAL CAROLINA
Sept. 4 THE CITADEL
Sept. 11 KANSAS
Sept. 18 at Buffalo
Sept. 25 UMASS
Oct. 2 LOUISIANA-MONROE
Oct. 7 at Arkansas State
Oct. 20 at Appalachian State
Oct. 28 TROY
Nov. 6 at Georgia Southern
Nov. 13 GEORGIA STATE
Nov. 20 TEXAS STATE
Nov. 26 at South Alabama

### GEORGIA SOUTHERN
Sept. 4 GARDNER-WEBB
Sept. 11 at FAU
Sept. 18 at Arkansas
Sept. 25 LOUISIANA
Oct. 2 ARKANSAS STATE
Oct. 9 at Troy
Oct. 14 at South Alabama
Oct. 30 GEORGIA STATE
Nov. 6 COASTAL CAROLINA
Nov. 13 at Texas State
Nov. 20 BRIGHAM YOUNG
Nov. 27 at Appalachian State

### GEORGIA STATE
Sept. 4 ARMY
Sept. 11 at North Carolina
Sept. 18 CHARLOTTE
Sept. 25 at Auburn
Oct. 2 APPALACHIAN STATE
Oct. 9 at Louisiana-Monroe
Oct. 23 TEXAS STATE
Oct. 30 at Georgia Southern
Nov. 4 at Louisiana
Nov. 13 at Coastal Carolina
Nov. 20 ARKANSAS STATE
Nov. 27 TROY

### LOUISIANA
Sept. 4 at Texas
Sept. 11 NICHOLLS STATE
Sept. 18 OHIO
Sept. 25 at Georgia Southern
Oct. 2 at South Alabama
Oct. 12 APPALACHIAN STATE
Oct. 21 at Arkansas State
Oct. 30 TEXAS STATE
Nov. 4 GEORGIA STATE
Nov. 13 at Troy
Nov. 20 at Liberty
Nov. 27 LOUISIANA-MONROE

### LOUISIANA-MONROE
Sept. 4 at Kentucky
Sept. 18 JACKSON STATE
Sept. 25 TROY
Oct. 2 at Coastal Carolina
Oct. 9 GEORGIA STATE
Oct. 16 LIBERTY
Oct. 23 SOUTH ALABAMA
Oct. 30 at Appalachian State
Nov. 6 at Texas State
Nov. 13 ARKANSAS STATE
Nov. 20 at LSU
Nov. 27 at Louisiana

### SOUTH ALABAMA
Sept. 4 SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI
Sept. 11 at Bowling Green
Sept. 18 ALCORN STATE
Oct. 2 LOUISIANA
Oct. 9 at Texas State
Oct. 14 GEORGIA SOUTHERN
Oct. 23 at Louisiana Monroe
Oct. 30 ARKANSAS STATE
Nov. 6 at Troy
Nov. 13 at Appalachian State
Nov. 20 at Tennessee
Nov. 26 COASTAL CAROLINA

### TEXAS STATE
Sept. 4 BAYLOR
Sept. 11 at FIU
Sept. 18 UIW
Sept. 25 at Eastern Michigan
Oct. 9 SOUTH ALABAMA
Oct. 16 TROY
Oct. 23 at Georgia State
Oct. 30 at Louisiana
Nov. 6 LOUISIANA-MONROE
Nov. 13 GEORGIA SOUTHERN
Nov. 20 at Coastal Carolina
Nov. 27 at Arkansas State

### TROY
Sept. 4 SOUTHERN
Sept. 11 LIBERTY
Sept. 18 at Southern Miss
Sept. 25 at Louisiana-Monroe
Oct. 2 at South Carolina
Oct. 9 GEORGIA SOUTHERN
Oct. 16 at Texas State
Oct. 28 at Coastal Carolina
Nov. 6 SOUTH ALABAMA
Nov. 13 LOUISIANA
Nov. 20 APPALACHIAN STATE
Nov. 27 at Georgia State

# SEC RECRUITING

By Andrew Ivins

## Alabama

***Overview:*** Nick Saban flexed his muscle on the recruiting trail as the Crimson Tide inked the highest-ranked recruiting class in college football history. The defending national champions ended up signing seven recruits who finished as 247Sports five-stars along with 17 more four-stars.

***Headliner:*** Cornerback is considered a premium position, and **Ga'Quincy McKinstry** (Pinson, Ala./Pinson Valley) deserves some recognition. Alabama's Mr. Football could play wide receiver for a lot of colleges, but his ceiling is even higher on the defensive side of the ball. He has the skills to develop into a multi-year starter for Saban.

***Bottom Line:*** At this point it feels as if the Crimson Tide are simply evaluating and choosing who they want as they don't lose many, if any, recruiting battles. Alabama continues to churn out first-round NFL Draft picks and offensive tackle **JC Latham** (Bradenton, Fla./IMG Academy), defensive end **Dallas Turner** (Fort Lauderdale, Fla./St. Thomas Aquinas), linebacker **Deontae Lawson** (Mobile, Ala./ Mobile Christian) and McKinstry all look like guys that will eventually play on Sundays.

## LSU

***Overview:*** The 2020 season might not have gone as planned for the Tigers, but Ed Orgeron didn't let that impact recruiting as he and his staff signed the nation's No. 3-ranked class. LSU got what it wanted locally, signing six of the Bayou State's top eight-ranked prospects.

***Headliner:*** **Maason Smith** (Houma, La./Terrebonne) was always viewed as an LSU lean, but he didn't make things official with the Tigers until the first day of the Early Signing Period. The nation's No. 2-ranked defensive tackle is a big, disruptive pass rusher that should be able to create plenty of push up the middle and work his way into the rotation early.

***Bottom Line:*** LSU reloaded this cycle addressing needs across the board. **Sage Ryan** (Lafayette, La./Lafayette Christian) and **Derrick Davis Jr.** (Monroeville, Pa./Gateway) form an elite duo at safety, while **Brian Thomas Jr.** (Walker, La./Walker), **Chris Hilton** (Zachary, La./Zachary) and **Malik Nabers** (Youngsville, La./ Southside) give LSU three young, promising receivers. **Garrett Nussmeier** (Marcus, Texas/Flower Mound) is one of the country's top pure passers.

## Georgia

***Overview:*** Kirby Smart is still trying to string together back-to-back No. 1-ranked recruiting classes. After signing the nation's top group in 2020, the Bulldogs finished with the No. 4-ranked group in 2021. It included 11 prospects from the Peach State — the most in three years for UGA.

***Headliner:*** **Brock Vandagriff** (Bogart, Ga./Prince Avenue Christian) might be Georgia's quarterback of the future, but there might not be a more important signee than **Nyland Green** (Covington, Ga./Newton) given the team's needs in the secondary. The nation's No. 4-ranked corner has a chance to start as a true freshman.

***Bottom Line:*** It wasn't a first place finish for Smart, but there's still a lot to like. The Bulldogs should have the future of its offensive line in place with tackle **Amarius Mims** (Cochran, Ga./Bleckley County), guard **Micah Morris** (Kingsland, Ga./Camden County) and center **Dylan Farichild** (Cumming, Ga./West Forsyth) all headed to Athens. **Brock Bowers** (Napa, Calif./Napa) has TE1 potential.

## Texas A&M

***Overview:*** The Aggies continue to attract blue-chip talent under the direction of Jimbo Fisher. Texas A&M signed 16 recruits ranked four-stars or better. That was good

## TOP 20 INCOMING SEC RECRUITS

| Rk. | Player | Ht./Wt. | Pos. | Hometown/School | College |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | JC Latham | 6-6/305 | OT | Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy | Alabama |
| 2. | Tommy Brockermeyer | 6-7/283 | OT | Fort Worth (Texas) All Saints Episcopal | Alabama |
| 3. | Amarius Mims | 6-7/330 | OT | Cochran (Ga.) Bleckley County | Georgia |
| 4. | Dallas Turner | 6-4/245 | DE | Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas | Alabama |
| 5. | Brock Vandergriff | 6-3/205 | QB | Bogart (Ga.) Prince Avenue Christian | Georgia |
| 6. | Ga'Quincy McKinstry | 6-1/180 | CB | Pinson (Ala.) Pinson Valley | Alabama |
| 7. | Maason Smith | 6-5/316 | DT | Houma (La.) Terrebonne | LSU |
| 8. | Shemar Turner | 6-4/283 | DT | DeSoto (Texas) High | Texas A&M |
| 9. | Damon Payne | 6-4/297 | DT | Belleville (Mich.) High | Alabama |
| 10. | Xavian Sorey | 6-3/214 | LB | Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy | Georgia |
| 11. | Jacorey Brooks | 6-3/185 | WR | Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy | Alabama |
| 12. | Jason Marshall | 6-2/180 | CB | Miami (Fla.) Palmetto | Florida |
| 13. | Sage Ryan | 5-11/193 | S | Lafayette (La.) Lafayette Christian Academy | LSU |
| 14. | Camar Wheaton | 5-11/190 | RB | Garland (Texas) Lakeview Centennial | Alabama |
| 15. | Smael Mondon | 6-3/220 | LB | Dallas (Ga.) Paulding County | Georgia |
| 16. | Tunmise Adeleye | 6-3/245 | DE | Katy (Texas) Tompkins | Texas A&M |
| 17. | Agiye Hall | 6-3/190 | WR | Valrico (Fla.) Bloomingdale | Alabama |
| 18. | LJ Johnson | 5-10/204 | RB | Cypress (Texas) Cy-Fair | Texas A&M |
| 19. | JoJo Earle | 5-10/170 | WR | Aledo (Texas) High | Alabama |
| 20. | Terrion Arnold | 6-0/180 | S | Tallahassee (Fla.) John Paul II Catholic | Alabama |

enough to slot Fisher's class No. 7 in the national rankings and give the folks in College Station their third straight top 10-ranked recruiting class.

***Headliner:*** There's a reason why **Shemar Turner** (DeSoto, Texas/DeSoto) has five stars next to his name and that's because he's a scheme-versatile, athletic defensive lineman that has no issues getting to the quarterback. He totaled 24 tackles for loss and 12.5 sacks as a senior.

***Bottom Line:*** It hasn't taken long for Fisher to turn Texas A&M's roster into one that can contend for titles and this 2021 haul keeps things headed in the right direction. The Aggies wanted to add some beef up front and did just that signing six offensive linemen and six defensive linemen. **LJ Johnson** (Cypress, Texas/Cy-Fair) and **Amari Daniels** (Miami, Fla./Miami Central) are two elusive running backs that can share the workload down the line.

## Florida

***Overview:*** Florida lit up the scoreboard in 2020, but the Gators' No. 12-ranked recruiting class packs plenty of defensive star power as UF's top four-ranked signees all play defense. Dan Mullen did, however, add some offensive skill talent at both wide receiver and tight end.

***Headliner:*** **Jeremiah Williams** (Brimingham, Ala./Ramsay) was one of the best players at the annual Alabama-Mississippi All-Star Game. He's viewed by some analysts as a stand-up edge rusher, but could be deployed as more of a traditional linebacker given how he's able to read and react in coverage.

***Bottom Line:*** Mullen & Co. aren't afraid to mine the transfer portal for players that can make an immediate impact, but at the same time they still devote plenty of resources into recruiting the high school ranks. It was a big deal when they beat out Miami for five-star cornerback **Jason Marshall** (Miami, Fla./Miami Palmetto) and even a bigger deal when they went into the Yellowhammer State and landed Williams.

## Ole Miss

***Overview:*** Lane Kiffin was brought to Oxford to score points and win recruiting battles. He's doing both. The Rebels pulled off a series of late flips to put an exclamation point on the school's best recruiting class in five years as the group finished ranked No. 17 nationally.

***Headliner:*** This will likely be Matt Corral's final season at Ole Miss. That means Kiffin is going to need someone else to sling the ball around in two years and that could very well be **Luke Altmyer** (Starkville, Miss./Starkville). The Elite 11 finalist was a longtime FSU commit that couldn't turn down the opportunity to play for the Rebels.

***Bottom Line:*** Kiffin seems to have things trending in the right direction. Altmyer was a big get for the staff, but adding talented defenders like cornerback **MJ Daniels** (Lucedale, Miss./George County), defensive tackle **Tywone Malone** (Oradell, N.J./Bergen Catholic) and safety **Tysheem Johnson** (Philadelphia, Pa./Neumann Goretti) could prove to be more important as those three should help shore up a defense that gave up too many chunk plays in 2020.

## Auburn

***Overview:*** The Auburn brass made the bold decision to part ways with Gus Malzahn three days before the Early Signing Period. The Tigers still found a way, however, to still sign the nation's No. 19-ranked recruiting class as they locked up five four-star prospects.

***Headliner:*** **Lee Hunter** (Eight Mile, Ala./Blount) was committed to Auburn throughout much of the process, but it was unclear if he would stick by his verbal pledge as the school went through a coaching search. The nation's No. 7-ranked defensive tackle did and should get meaningful snaps this fall.

***Bottom Line:*** Bryan Harsin got things across the finish line for the Tigers and picked up some talent along the way. **Dylan Brooks** (Roanoke, Ala./Handley) had plenty of options after being released from Tennessee, but picked Auburn. He gives Harsin a legit edge rusher. **Jarquez Hunter** (Philadelphia, Miss./Neshona Central) wasn't billed as a national recruit, but was super productive running back at the high school level and has an extra gear.

## Tennessee

***Overview:*** It was a hot start for the Volunteers as at one point they held the nation's No. 2-ranked recruiting class. A number of losses and the decision to eventually terminate Jeremy Pruitt, however, dropped UT's class all the way down to No. 22 in the rankings.

***Headliner:*** Tennessee saw a number of players leave via the transfer portal during the winter months. That has opened the door for a bunch of newcomers to play and junior college linebacker **Byron Young** (Georgia Military College) figures to be someone that pushes for a starting gig given the program's departures.

***Bottom Line:*** Josh Heupel has his work cut out for him as he tries to turn things around in Knoxville. The Volunteers made some notable additions landing quarterback **Kaidon Salter** (Cedar Hill, Texas/Cedar Hill), linebacker **Aaron Willis** (Colonial, Heights, Va./Life Christian Academy) and others, but also saw two of their top signees get released from their National Letters of Intent once it became clear that Pruitt was out.

## Arkansas

***Overview:*** The Razorbacks might have only signed three four-star recruits, but Sam Pittman and his staff did an excellent job of identifying high three-star recruits early on in the process and getting them committed, which in turn led to a No. 25 finish in the rankings.

***Headliner:*** **Ketron Jackson** (Royse, Texas/Royse City) appeared to be favoring Texas early on in his recruitment, but picked Arkansas because of the relationship he had with Pittman and others in Fayetteville. He gives the offense a true big-play threat with some impressive top-end speed.

***Bottom Line:*** Pittman was considered a strong recruiter when he was a position coach at Georgia, but it was unclear how he would do running his own show. So far, he has exceeded expectations. The Razorbacks' 2021 class isn't exactly sexy, but it's full of prospects that should develop into members of the team's two-deep.

## Mississippi State

***Overview:*** Mike Leach's first full recruiting class in Starkville checks in at No. 26 overall in the rankings after a 4-7 season for the Bulldogs. It, unsurprisingly, features two quarterbacks: **Sawyer Robertson** (Lubbock, Texas/ Coronado) and **Daniel Greek** (Argyle, Tx./Liberty Christian).

***Headliner:*** Robertson is the highest-ranked signee for Mississippi State, but there was no bigger win this cycle than when the Bulldogs edged rival Ole Miss for **John Lewis** (Madison, Miss./ Germantown). The nation's No. 14-ranked outside 'backer runs well enough to play all three downs.

***Bottom Line:*** Leach is considered an offensive mastermind, but Mississippi State's defensive signees are the ones that really stand out. In addition to Lewis, the Bulldogs strengthened their pass rush with the signature of All-American edge rusher **Deonte Anderson** (Fort Meade, Fla./Fort Meade) and Mississippi's Mr. Football **Ty Cooper** (Louisville, Miss./Louisville). **Nic Mitchell** (Jacksonville, Fla./Mandarin) is another sneaky good take.

## Missouri

***Overview:*** The Tigers clawed all the way up to No. 28 in the rankings giving the program its highest-ranked recruiting class since Drew Lock took his talents to Missouri back in 2015. Eli Drinkwitz held onto what he could in-state before grabbing what he could from much more fertile recruiting grounds like Florida and Texas.

***Headliner:*** **Tyler Macon** (East St. Louis, Ill./East St. Louis) was one of the surprises at the Elite 11 finals as he held his own throwing alongside the nation's top quarterbacks. He didn't get a senior season, but led his team to a 14-0 record as a junior accounting for over 5,000 yards of offense and 56 touchdowns.

***Bottom Line:*** Keep an eye on what Drinkwitz & Co. do during the 2022 cycle because there's reason to believe that they can build Missouri's roster into something that can challenge the best of the best in the SEC. **Jaddarius Perkins** (Mississippi Gulf Coast C.C.) is a long corner that at one time looked to be headed to Oregon. **Dominic Lovett** (East St. Louis, Ill./East St. Louis), on the other hand, is a receiver the Tigers flipped late from Arizona State.

## Kentucky

***Overview:*** UK cashed in locally securing signatures from six of the Bluegrass State's top eight prospects. Mark Stoops and his staff were also very active down in both Georgia and Alabama as they pieced together a recruiting class that ranked No. 34 in the country.

***Headliner:*** **Jager Burton** (Lexington, Ky./Frederick Douglas) became the Wildcats' seventh-highest ranked signee in program history. The nation's No. 3 offensive guard started classes early in Lexington and is viewed by many as the type of lineman that could morph into an all-conference type of player.

***Bottom Line:*** On paper, this might not be a Top 25 class, but there's a good chance this Kentucky class outplays its rankings. **Trevin Wallace** (Jesup, Ga./Wayne County) was a linebacker plenty of schools wanted and could be another Jamin Davis for the Wildcats. **Christian Lewis** (Pleasant Grove, Ala./Pleasant Grove) is a large wideout with a basketball background that can create plenty of separation and make contested catches.

## Vanderbilt

***Overview:*** Clark Lea was hired just a few days before the Early Signing Period, which didn't give him much time to put his touch on a recruiting class that finished No. 48 in the rankings.

***Headliner:*** **Marcus Bradley** (Gaithersburg, Md./Quince Orchard) was the only consensus four-star recruit to ink with the Commodores. The All-American defensive tackle has some burst to him and was expected to go through spring practices as an early enrollee.

***Bottom Line:*** Lea wants to revolutionize recruiting at Vanderbilt, but that doesn't happen overnight. The big win for Lea in the 2021 cycle came on National Signing Day came when the Commodores edged Wake Forest for three-star running back **Patrick Smith** (Absecon, N.J./Holy Spirit).

## South Carolina

***Overview:*** The Gamecocks signed one of the worst recruiting classes in SEC history. The group of 13 signees ranked No. 79 in the country, which was behind schools like Toledo, UNLV, UTSA and North Texas.

***Headliner:*** **Tavareon Scott** (Dodge City C.C.) is a do-it-all type of linebacker who is expected to arrive in Columbia this summer. It wouldn't be surprising if he carved out a role somewhere on defense as South Carolina looks to get things back on track in the post-Will Muschamp era.

***Bottom Line:*** New coach Shane Beamer was put in a difficult situation. He elected to use most of his spots and counters on players in the NCAA's transfer portal, which is why the Gamecocks' class is light on numbers. **Marcellas Dial** (Georgia Military College) and **Isaiah Norris** (Georgia Military College) are two junior college corners South Carolina needed to get.

# PICKING THE SEC

## Georgia, A&M Chasing Alabama in Another Loaded SEC

Not even a pandemic could keep Alabama from rolling to another national championship.

Behind a record-setting offense, the Crimson Tide helped coach Nick Saban record a seventh national championship (six at Alabama, one at LSU). There seems to be no end in sight, even as the rest of the SEC shifts below Bama.

The hiring of coach Jimbo Fisher finally paid dividends for Texas A&M last year as the Aggies announced they are a Top 10 team after going 9-1 — the one loss being against Alabama.

After an historic run to the 2019 national championship, LSU faltered to 5-5, thanks to an injury at quarterback, a deficient defense ... and lots of other stuff.

Auburn fired Gus Malzahn after a winning season. Can Bryan Harsin provide consistently elite results?

In the East, Florida scored its way to a division title, upending Georgia. But the Bulldogs appear ready to wrestle back the division title from the Gators, thanks to a rock-solid defense and what figures to be superior quarterback play.

Tennessee fired Jeremy Pruitt after three years and a boatload of NCAA recruiting allegations and hired Josh Heupel of Central Florida.

South Carolina tired of Will Muschamp's anemic offense and hired Shane Beamer, son for former Virginia Tech coach Frank Beamer.

The popular Derek Mason couldn't survive an 0-9 season and Vanderbilt hired an alum, Clark Lea.

### WEST DIVISION

Alabama produced its third Heisman Trophy winner in a dozen years (receiver DeVonta Smith) and had two others finish in the top five (quarterback Mac Jones, running back Najee Harris).

While the Tide must replace some dynamic weapons and revamp a terrific offensive line, how could you bet against Saban doing just that? He has hired former NFL head coach Bill O'Brien to run the offense, which will be directed by touted Bryce Young.

The defense led the SEC in points allowed, tackles for loss and sacks, yet Saban felt it was average by his standards — which means allowing fewer than 14 points per game. This year's defense could rank among the nation's best. Or, it will actually be the best.

Texas A&M must replace four-year starter Kellen Mond, but the Aggies have exceptional backs, led by 1,000-yard rusher Isaiah Spiller, talented receivers and a big-time tight end.

The Bo Pelini experience as a defensive coordinator at LSU was a miserable failure. The Tigers' defense should be much better and the offense, which lost quarterback Myles Brennan early in the season to injury, should be potent, although not to the standard of the 2019 team. That, of course, is a crazy-high bar.

Malzahn beat Alabama three times in eight years — more than anyone else in the SEC — but his offense became stagnant. The Tigers hired Boise State's Harsin, who has to unlock the potential of one of the SEC's top returning quarterbacks in Bo Nix, who has a win over Alabama.

Ole Miss will score plenty of points under Lane Kiffin with quarterback Matt Corral, but the defense will again be porous.

Mike Leach's first Mississippi State offense had two games of at least 44 points, but also failed to score twice and got no more than 14 points three other times.

## CONFERENCE PICKS

| SEC EAST | Good news | Bad news | Our call |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Georgia | USC transfer QB JT Daniels gave the offense a huge lift late in the season. | The secondary is going to look a lot different; WR George Pickens likely out for year. | Thanks to a stout defense and Daniels, Georgia will reclaim the title in the East. |
| 2. Florida | Dan Mullen should get production from Emory Jones, who is a shot of athleticism at QB. | Daunting to replace QB Kyle Trask, TE Kyle Pitts, WR Kadarius Toney. Also, OL could struggle. | Florida will challenge in the East, but the offense won't be as explosive. |
| 3. Missouri | QB Connor Bazelak was one of SEC's most accurate passers at 67.3 percent. | Lost all-time leading rusher Larry Rountree III, and defense lost LB Nick Bolton. | Mizzou will be a tough out, but isn't talented enough to consistently run with SEC's elite. |
| 4. Kentucky | Mark Stoops always fields a hard-nosed team, run game should be strong. | Less-than-stellar QB play has kept Kentucky from winning even more under Stoops. | Kentucky should improve over 5-6 season, but the ceiling appears to be seven wins. |
| 5. Tennessee | Josh Heupel will generate offense with his fast-paced scheme and QB friendly attack. | Vols lost more than 25 in transfer portal and are extremely thin at linebacker. | Vols could score a lot, give up a lot ... and break even at the end of the season. |
| 6. South Carolina | Kevin Harris (1,138 yards) was one of three 1,000-yard running backs in SEC. | Gamecocks don't have depth along the line of scrimmage and defense is weak. | Should be better than 2-8, but depends on QB play and defense. |
| 7. Vanderbilt | Quarterback Ken Seals set Vandy freshman passing records and is a real talent. | Vandy lacks overall talent, lost best RB to transfer and defense has issues. | Vandy won't go winless again, but anything better than 3-9 would be huge achievement. |
| **SEC WEST** | | | |
| 1. Alabama | Bama always has offensive weapons and defense might be Saban's best in years. | Hard to replace the triplets: Jones-Harris-Smith. OL lost star power, too. | Tide's best-ever offense will decline a bit but stifling defense leads to another natty title. |
| 2. Texas A&M | Isaiah Spiller went over 1,000 rushing yards last year; WR-TE corps is talented. | Will be hard to replace the dual threat and production provided by Kellen Mond. | Aggies might not match 9-1 record, but a Top 10 finish is within reach. |
| 3. LSU | QB Myles Brennan averaged 370 passing yards in three games before injury; he's back. | Defense that was one of the worst in school history won't return to typical LSU level. | LSU has revamped staff and raw talent; Tigers go from 5-5 to nine or 10 wins. |
| 4. Auburn | QB Bo Nix beat Alabama as freshman; defense should be solid with LB Owen Pappoe. | New systems might take a while to learn; OL has to help out Nix, RB Tank Bigsby. | Not a major rebuild like at some SEC schools, and Tigers should flirt with Top 25. |
| 5. Ole Miss | Lane Kiffin got great year from QB Matt Corral (3,337 yards, 70.9 percent, 29 TDs). | Defense allowed SEC-worst 383 points; yep, stopping folks will be a concern again. | Rebels' offense was worth cheering about, but defense limits upward mobility. |
| 6. Mississippi State | Mike Leach's teams usually show improvement in Year 2 of rebuild. | Inability to run stifled offense; Bulldogs scored 14 or fewer points five times in 2020. | Will Rogers might be the answer at QB as the Bulldogs push toward a bowl. |
| 7. Arkansas | Sam Pittman made team competitive in first year; WR Treylon Burks is special. | Need to find QB, lost a good RB early to NFL and good WR to transfer portal. | Hogs played hard last year, scored some upsets ... but not ready to go from 3-7 to a bowl. |

## EAST DIVISION

Florida upset Georgia to snap the Bulldogs' three-year run of East Division titles. Quarterback Kyle Trask and tight end Kyle Pitts proved to be a dynamic duo.

Florida should again be strong as coach Dan Mullen figures to get production from quarterback Emory Jones. But this Gator offense won't be as good as it was a year ago and the team ended the season on a three-game losing streak.

Look for Georgia to reclaim the East crown. Quarterback JT Daniels, the USC transfer, didn't play early in the season as he hadn't been cleared from injury. But he was outstanding down the stretch, giving Georgia the signal caller it needs to win the division and get to the Playoff.

The Bulldogs have good weapons at running back and receiver and could boast the second-best defense in the SEC.

No other team seems capable of challenging Georgia and Florida.

Missouri is the best of the next bunch. The Tigers managed a 5-5 SEC record in coach Eli Drinkwitz's first season and returns SEC Freshman of the Year Connor Bazelak, who completed 67.3 percent of his passes for 2,366 yards. The defense, however, loses its best player in linebacker Nick Bolton.

— Jimmy Hyams

### HONOR ROLL

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Most Accurate Passer** | Matt Corral | Ole Miss |
| **Strongest Arm** | Matt Corral | Ole Miss |
| **Best Scrambler** | Emory Jones | Florida |
| **Coolest In The Clutch** | JT Daniels | Georgia |
| **Toughest To Bring Down** | Kevin Harris | South Carolina |
| **Best Hands** | Jalen Wydermyer | Texas A&M |
| **Most Dangerous Deep Threat** | John Metchie III | Alabama |
| **Best Pass Blocker** | Charles Cross | Mississippi State |
| **Best Run Blocker** | Evan Neal | Alabama |
| **Best Cover Corner** | Derek Stingley Jr. | LSU |
| **Best Pass Rusher** | Will Anderson Jr. | Alabama |
| **Special Teams Demon** | Velus Jones Jr. | Tennessee |

**Most Valuable Player**

Christian Harris
LB, Alabama

**Offensive Player of the Year**

Matt Corral
Ole Miss

**Defensive Player of the Year**

Derek Stingley Jr.
CB, LSU

**Newcomer of the Year**

Wan'Dale Robinson
WR, Kentucky

# Lindy's **ALL-SEC TEAM**

### OFFENSE - FIRST TEAM

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| QB | Matt Corral | Jr. | Ole Miss |
| RB | Tank Bigsby | So. | Auburn |
| RB | Isaiah Spiller | Jr. | Texas A&M |
| WR | Treylon Burks | Jr. | Arkansas |
| WR | John Metchie III | Jr. | Alabama |
| TE | Jalen Wydermyer | Jr. | Texas A&M |
| C | Ricky Stromberg | Jr. | Arkansas |
| OL | Darian Kinnard | Sr. | Kentucky |
| OL | Evan Neal | Jr. | Alabama |
| OL | Charles Cross | Jr. | Mississippi State |
| OL | Kenyon Green | Jr. | Texas A&M |
| AP | Jerrion Ealy | Jr. | Ole Miss |
| PK | Cade York | Jr. | LSU |

### DEFENSE - FIRST TEAM

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| DL | Jordan Davis | Sr. | Georgia |
| DL | DeMarvin Leal | Jr. | Texas A&M |
| DL | Ali Gaye | Sr. | LSU |
| LB | Will Anderson Jr. | So. | Alabama |
| LB | Christian Harris | Jr. | Alabama |
| LB | Owen Pappoe | Jr. | Auburn |
| LB | Grant Morgan | Sr. | Arkansas |
| DB | Derek Stingley | Jr. | LSU |
| DB | Kaiir Elam | Jr. | Florida |
| DB | Josh Jobe | Sr. | Alabama |
| DB | Lewis Cine | Jr. | Georgia |
| P | Jake Camarda | Sr. | Georgia |

### OFFENSE - SECOND TEAM

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| QB | JT Daniels | Jr. | Georgia |
| RB | Zamir White | So. | Georgia |
| RB | Kevin Harris | Sr. | South Carolina |
| WR | Kayshon Boutte | So. | LSU |
| WR | Ainias Smith | Jr. | Texas A&M |
| TE | Nick Muse | Sr. | South Carolina |
| C | Liam Shanahan | Sr. | LSU |
| OL | Cade Mays | Sr. | Tennessee |
| OL | Ed Ingram | Sr. | LSU |
| OL | Jamaree Salyer | Sr. | Georgia |
| OL | Dylan Wonnum | Sr. | South Carolina |
| AP | Kearis Jackson | Jr. | Georgia |
| PK | Will Reichard | Jr. | Alabama |

### DEFENSE - SECOND TEAM

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| DL | Kingsley Enagbare | Sr. | South Carolina |
| DL | Jayden Peevy | Sr. | Texas A&M |
| DL | Sam Williams | Sr. | Ole Miss |
| LB | Ventrell Miller | Jr. | Florida |
| LB | Brenton Cox | Jr. | Florida |
| LB | Nakobe Dean | Jr. | Georgia |
| LB | Bumper Pool | Sr. | Arkansas |
| DB | Demani Richardson | Jr. | Texas A&M |
| DB | Jordan Battle | Jr. | Alabama |
| DB | Jalen Catalon | So. | Arkansas |
| DB | Eli Ricks | So. | LSU |
| P | Mac Brown | Sr. | Ole Miss |

### OFFENSE - THIRD TEAM

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| QB | Bryce Young | Fr. | Alabama |
| RB | Chris Rodriguez Jr. | Jr. | Kentucky |
| RB | Trelon Smith | Jr. | Arkansas |
| WR | Dontario Drummond | Sr. | Ole Miss |
| WR | Cam Johnson | Sr. | Vanderbilt |
| TE | Jahleel Billingsley | Jr. | Alabama |
| C | Stewart Reese | Sr. | Florida |
| OL | Myron Cunningham | Sr. | Arkansas |
| OL | Austin Deculus | Sr. | LSU |
| OL | Nick Broeker | Jr. | Ole Miss |
| OL | Ben Brown | Sr. | Ole Miss |
| AP | Velus Jones Jr. | Sr. | Tennessee |
| PK | Anders Carlson | Sr. | Auburn |

### DEFENSE - THIRD TEAM

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| DL | Kobie Whiteside | Sr. | Missouri |
| DL | Zacch Pickens | Jr. | South Carolina |
| DL | D.J. Dale | Jr. | Alabama |
| LB | B.J. Ojulari | So. | LSU |
| LB | Jacquez Jones | Sr. | Ole Miss |
| LB | Henry To'o To'o | Jr. | Alabama |
| LB | Damone Clark | Sr. | LSU |
| DB | Malachi Moore | So. | Alabama |
| DB | Jay Ward | Jr. | LSU |
| DB | Leon O'Neal Jr. | Sr. | Texas A&M |
| DB | Tykee Smith | Jr. | Georgia |
| P | Paxton Brooks | Sr. | Tennessee |

# THE BIG ONES

**Sept. 4**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Alabama vs. Miami (Atlanta)** | Tide starts defense of national title vs. talented Miami team. |
| **Georgia vs. Clemson (Charlotte)** | Two teams hoping to make CFP get early litmus test. |
| **LSU at UCLA** | Tigers put defense to test early in rare West Coast appearance. |

**Sept. 6**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Ole Miss vs. Louisville (Atlanta)** | Will Rebels offense be as explosive as last year vs. ACC foe? |

**Sept. 11**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Texas at Arkansas** | A once-great SWC rivalry renewed as teams look to rebuild. |
| **Pitt at Tennessee** | Vols take on team that former UT coach John Majors led to title. |
| **Texas A&M vs. Colorado (Denver)** | Aggies get tested in rarified air against dangerous Pac-12 opponent. |

**Sept. 18**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Alabama at Florida** | Rematch of SEC title game, but don't look for another 52-46 score-fest. |
| **Auburn at Penn State** | Bryan Harsin takes team on major road trip to Happy Valley. |

**Sept. 25**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Tennessee at Florida** | Gators have dominated Vols, having lost just once since 2004. |

**Oct. 2**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Ole Miss at Alabama** | Tide's 63-48 win last year had Nick Saban wondering if Rebels stole signals. |
| **Auburn at LSU** | In battle of Tigers, Auburn has a new head coach, LSU has a new staff. |

**Oct. 9**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Alabama at Texas A&M** | Are Aggies ready to challenge Alabama for West Division supremacy? |
| **Georgia at Auburn** | South's oldest rivalry might be rare defensive struggle. |

**Oct. 16**

| | |
|---|---|
| **LSU at Florida** | Tigers won wild 37-34 game at Swamp thanks to shoe-throwing penalty. |
| **Ole Miss at Tennessee** | Lane Kiffin returns to scene of his first college head coaching job. |

**Oct. 23**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Tennessee at Alabama** | Saban hasn't lost to UT since taking over at Bama in 2007. |
| **LSU at Ole Miss** | This once fierce rivalry figures to produce plenty of fireworks. |

**Oct. 30**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Florida-Georgia (Jacksonville)** | Kirby Smart is 3-1 against Gators, winner likely wins East. |

**Nov. 6**

| | |
|---|---|
| **LSU at Alabama** | Tigers won shootout last time teams met in Tuscaloosa. |
| **Auburn at Texas A&M** | This could be battle to see who stays in West Division race. |

**Nov. 27**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Ole Miss at Mississippi State** | Kiffin outscored Leach, 31-24, in first Egg Bowl between the two. |
| **Alabama at Auburn** | Tigers won Iron Bowl behind frosh QB last time played at Auburn. |
| **Texas A&M at LSU** | These border rivals have gone 7 overtimes and had big blowouts. |
| **Florida State at Florida** | Mullen's Gators have routed FSU in the past two matchups. |

**WILL ANDERSON**

Photo by Michael Wade

## BOWL CONNECTIONS

One or more SEC teams are eligible for the four-team College Football Playoff. The top SEC team not selected for the semifinals will go to the Orange Bowl. The SEC has a tie-in with the Belk and Las Vegas Bowl in alternating years.

| | |
|---|---|
| **SEC #1** | **CFB or Orange** |
| **SEC #2** | **Citrus vs. Big Ten** |
| **SEC #3-8** | **Outback vs. Big Ten** |
| **SEC #3-8** | **Taxslayer Gator Bowl vs. ACC** |
| **SEC #3-8** | **Music City vs. Big Ten** |
| **SEC #3-8** | **Liberty vs. Big 12** |
| **SEC #3-8** | **Texas vs. Big 12** |
| **SEC #3-8** | **Las Vegas v. Pac-12** |
| **SEC #9-10** | **Birmingham vs. AAC** |
| **SEC #9-10** | **Bad Boy Mowers Gasparilla v. ACC** |

## TOP 10 NFL TALENT

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Derek Stingley | CB | LSU | Jr. | Best cover CB in SEC (and beyond); great speed, technique. |
| 2. JT Daniels | QB | Georgia | Jr. | QBs with this kind of profile tend to get drafted early. |
| 3. George Pickens | WR | Georgia | Jr. | Big body, good hands; will have to show his ACL is healthy. |
| 4. DeMarvin Leal | DL | Texas A&M | Jr. | Explosive player who can rush the passer, stuff the run. |
| 5. Kaiir Elam | CB | Florida | Jr. | Good ball skills; had two picks, 11 passes broken up. |
| 6. Christian Harris | LB | Alabama | Jr. | Outstanding athlete, 2nd on team with 79 tackles. 4.5 sacks. |
| 7. Brenton Cox | OLB | Florida | Jr. | Very athletic, had 41 tackles, four sacks; three-down LB. |
| 8. Evan Neal | OL | Alabama | Jr. | Powerful run blocker; plays with good technique. |
| 9. Charles Cross | OT | Miss. State | Jr. | Very good in pass protection; excellent feet for big man. |
| 10. Jalen Wydermyer | TE | Texas A&M | Jr. | Tight ends like this go off the board earlier and earlier. |

# SEC YEAR IN REVIEW

## THE RACE

It couldn't have been known at the time, but the SEC West was decided in Week 2 of a season in which it was all conference games all the time for 10 weeks — providing there were no COVID cancellations.

So it was that on Oct. 3, when Alabama dispatched Texas A&M, 52-24, with Mac Jones throwing for 435 yards, that the Crimson Tide was more than on its way to another division title and all the prizes that come after that. The Aggies wouldn't lose again ... but Alabama never lost at all, so there wasn't much drama.

In the East, Georgia entered the season with three consecutive division titles while expecting to battle rival Florida to stay on top. That stayed true to form. When the classic matchup in Jacksonville took place on Nov. 7, each team had a conference loss — with nobody else in the East emerging as a threat.

It looked to be the Dawgs' day when they went up 14-0 less than four minutes into the game, but that Gators offense was not going to be denied, especially going against a banged-up Georgia D. Kyle Trask led Florida to 24 consecutive points to end the half with a 38-21 lead, and Dan Mullen's crew went on to win, 44-28, to tip the East to its favor.

## THE CHAMPION

It didn't seem as if an offense could be more dominant than LSU's in the Tigers' 2019 national championship season, but then along came 2020 Alabama. The Crimson Tide averaged 48.5 points per game — one-tenth better than LSU a year earlier — and did so against a regular-season schedule of all conference games.

With quarterback Mac Jones, Heisman-winning receiver DeVonta Smith, running back Najee Harris, a powerhouse offensive line and depth, the Tide rolled foes, scoring more than 50 points in seven games, including 52 against Ohio State to win the national title in a breeze.

Only Florida and Ole Miss, came within two touchdowns of Alabama all season.

## THE STARS

**Offensive Player of the Year: DeVonta Smith, WR, Alabama**

A wide receiver winning the Heisman? Smith pulled off the feat as a slight, but unstoppable force, catching 117 passes for 1,856 yards and a remarkable 23 touchdowns in 13 games.

**Defensive Player of the Year: Patrick Surtain II, CB, Alabama**

Quarterbacks knew to not test Surtain, but he still managed to break up 12 passes and pick off one. All the respect shown to Surtain was proven to be correct when the Denver Broncos made him the ninth pick of the NFL Draft.

**Coach of the Year: Nick Saban, Alabama**

Well, no surprise here, right? Saban won the SEC's coaching award for the fifth time — his fourth time at Alabama to go with the 2003 nod at LSU — mixing relentless offense with a defense that allowed more than 24 points just twice.

## THE BOWLS

The bowl situation was pretty ridiculous with 1) The NCAA allowing any team to play in a bowl, regardless of win-loss record, 2) Some two-dozen teams around the country "opting out" of bowl games, 3) Teams having to pull out because of a coronavirus outbreak in the program, 4) Teams not being able to play because their opponents got the virus.

Through it all, Alabama, Georgia and Texas A&M won New Year's Six bowls and the SEC went 7-2. The SEC had three teams with losing records beat ranked teams: Ole Miss beat No. 11 Indiana, MSU beat No. 24 Tulsa and Kentucky beat No. 23 NC State.

| | |
|---|---|
| **CFP National Championship** | **Alabama 52**, Ohio State 24 |
| **Rose Bowl (CFP Semifinal)** | **Alabama 31**, Notre Dame 14 |
| **Cotton Bowl** | Oklahoma 55, **Florida 20** |
| **Peach Bowl** | **Georgia 24**, Cincinnati 21 |
| **Orange Bowl** | **Texas A&M 41**, North Carolina 27 |
| **Citrus Bowl** | Northwestern 35, **Auburn 19** |
| **Outback Bowl** | **Ole Miss 26**, Indiana 20 |
| **Gator Bowl** | **Kentucky 23**, NC State 21 |
| **Armed Forces Bowl** | **Mississippi State 28**, Tulsa 26 |

## ALL-SEC TEAM

*as selected by the league coaches

### OFFENSE — First Team

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| QB | Mac Jones | Alabama |
| RB | Najee Harris | Alabama |
| RB | Isaiah Spiller | Texas A&M |
| WR | DeVonta Smith | Alabama |
| WR | Elijah Moore | Ole Miss |
| TE | Kyle Pitts | Florida |
| C | Landon Dickerson | Alabama |
| OL | Alex Leatherwood | Alabama |
| OL | Landon Young | Kentucky |
| OL | Ben Cleveland | Georgia |
| OL | Trey Smith | Tennessee |
| OL | Deonte Brown | Alabama |
| AP | Kadarius Toney | Florida |
| K | Cade York | LSU |

### OFFENSE — Second Team

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| QB | Kyle Trask | Florida |
| RB | Kevin Harris | South Carolina |
| RB | Larry Rountree III | Missouri |
| WR | Kadarius Toney | Florida |
| WR | Treylon Burks | Arkansas |
| TE | Jalen Wydermyer | Texas A&M |
| C | Drake Jackson | Kentucky |
| OL | Darian Kinnard | Kentucky |
| OL | Kenyon Green | Texas A&M |
| OL | Dan Moore Jr. | Texas A&M |
| OL | Carson Green | Texas A&M |
| AP | Jerrion Ealy | Ole Miss |
| K | Anders Carlson | Auburn |

### DEFENSE — First Team

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| DL | Christian Barmore | Alabama |
| DL | Kingsley Enagbare | South Carolina |
| DL | Trajan Jeffcoat | Missouri |
| DL | Bobby Brown III | Texas A&M |
| LB | Nick Bolton | Missouri |
| LB | Dylan Moses | Alabama |
| LB | Grant Morgan | Arkansas |
| DB | Patrick Surtain II | Alabama |
| DB | Kaiir Elam | Florida |
| DB | Richard LeCounte | Georgia |
| DB | Derek Stingley Jr. | LSU |
| P | Jake Camarda | Georgia |
| RS | Kadarius Toney | Florida |

### DEFENSE — Second Team

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| DL | Big Kat Bryant | Auburn |
| DL | Jordan Davis | Georgia |
| DL | Dayo Odeyingbo | Vanderbilt |
| DL | Ali Gaye | LSU |
| LB | Azeez Ojulari | Georgia |
| LB | Bumper Pool | Arkansas |
| LB | Christopher Allen | Alabama |
| DB | Eric Stokes | Georgia |
| DB | Malachi Moore | Alabama |
| DB | Jalen Catalon | Arkansas |
| DB | Jaycee Horn | South Carolina |
| P | Zach Von Rosenberg | LSU |
| RS | Jaylen Waddle | Alabama |

## THE STANDINGS

### EASTERN

| Team | Conference W-L | Conference Pct. | Conference PF | Conference PA | Overall W-L | Overall Pct. | Overall PF | Overall PA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Florida** | 8-2 | .800 | 412 | 263 | 8-4 | .667 | 478 | 370 |
| **Georgia** | 7-2 | .778 | 299 | 179 | 8-2 | .800 | 323 | 200 |
| **Missouri** | 5-5 | .500 | 267 | 323 | 5-5 | .500 | 267 | 323 |
| **Kentucky** | 4-6 | .400 | 217 | 264 | 5-6 | .455 | 240 | 285 |
| **Tennessee** | 3-7 | .300 | 215 | 301 | 3-7 | .300 | 215 | 301 |
| **South Carolina** | 2-8 | .200 | 235 | 360 | 2-8 | .200 | 235 | 360 |
| **Vanderbilt** | 0-9 | .000 | 133 | 336 | 0-9 | .000 | 133 | 336 |

### WESTERN

| Team | Conference W-L | Conference Pct. | Conference PF | Conference PA | Overall W-L | Overall Pct. | Overall PF | Overall PA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Alabama** | 10-0 | 1.000 | 495 | 168 | 13-0 | 1.000 | 630 | 252 |
| **Texas A&M** | 8-1 | .889 | 285 | 190 | 9-1 | .900 | 326 | 217 |
| **Auburn** | 6-4 | .600 | 257 | 237 | 6-5 | .545 | 276 | 272 |
| **LSU*** | 5-5 | .500 | 320 | 349 | 5-5 | .500 | 320 | 349 |
| **Ole Miss** | 4-5 | .444 | 366 | 363 | 5-5 | .500 | 392 | 383 |
| **Arkansas** | 3-7 | .300 | 257 | 349 | 3-7 | .300 | 257 | 349 |
| **Mississippi State** | 3-7 | .300 | 207 | 283 | 4-7 | .364 | 235 | 309 |

*** Ineligible for the postseason**

# AROUND THE SEC

## Never a Safe Time to be an SEC Head Coach

Many thought head coaches would get a pass during a pandemic year.

Well ... no.

The SEC fired four coaches, one for cause due to an NCAA investigation and another after a winning season. You know: In the SEC, it just means more.

After a 3-7 season, Tennessee parted ways with Jeremy Pruitt after three years and fired nine others as the school self-reported more than 50 recruiting violations. The NCAA had not ruled on a punishment as of mid-May, although it is believed UT will get a bowl ban, scholarship reductions and recruiting limitations. Basically, the usual package of punishment.

The Vols hired Josh Heupel from UCF to clean up the mess.

Gus Malzahn went 6-4 and had three wins over Alabama in eight years — more than any other SEC team during that time — but that wasn't good enough to keep him on The Plains. Auburn pried Bryan Harsin away from Boise State.

South Carolina fired Will Muschamp after a 2-5 start, another poor offensive showing and a five-year record of 28-30. With a history of hiring big names with loads of experience, the Gamecocks instead landed first-time head coach Shane Beamer, Oklahoma's assistant head coach the past three years and son of former Virginia Tech coaching great Frank Beamer.

Despite his popularity, Derek Mason couldn't survive an 0-9 disaster at Vanderbilt. Mason came close a couple of times but never had a winning record in seven seasons. The Commodores hired a Vandy alum, Clark Lea, who was Notre Dame's defensive coordinator for three years.

### Coordinator Hires

Perhaps the biggest coordinator splash was Nick Saban hiring Bill O'Brien as offensive coordinator to replace Steve Sarkisian (who was hired as the head coach at Texas). O'Brien served as head coach at Penn State and the NFL's Houston Texans.

O'Brien is the second NFL coach hired during the offseason by Saban. Doug Marrone, who was at Jacksonville, will coach Alabama's offensive line.

Auburn, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vanderbilt and LSU each have new offensive and defensive coordinators. Auburn lured Mike Bobo from South Carolina after he initially agreed to remain on

## FOUR-YEAR STANDINGS

Much is made of Alabama's dominance of the SEC (and the rest of the country) but consider that the current Georgia roster has been having its way with the league, too. While the SEC is generally considered to be the best and most competitive conference in college football, the two big dogs are clearly leading the pack.

When we remove the regular-season games against each other, the Crimson Bulldogs (see how we did that?) are a combined 59-7 (.893) — that's 52 games over .500, and it rounds to a combined 15-2 per season.

At the other end of the spectrum, Vanderbilt and Arkansas combine for 8-57 (.123) — kind of a dark mirror version of the two teams at the top. The RazorDores (OK, not as smooth as Crimson Bulldogs) average a combined 2-14 against the SEC over the past four years — 48 games under .500.

That means the current rosters in the conference are made up of guys who fight tooth and nail every week, pause to pound on weaklings Vanderbilt and Arkansas, and then get beat up when they take on Alabama and Georgia.

So, when those four teams are not playing? Flip a coin.

Here are the four-year standings, from the top of the college football mountain to the low valley:

| | SEC | Pct. | ALL | Pct. | C/D | NY6 | B | Comment |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alabama | 31-3 | .912 | 51-4 | .944 | 2/2 | 6 | 7 | Rebounded from 2-year national title drought. |
| Georgia | 28-5 | .848 | 44-9 | .830 | 1/3 | 5 | 5 | Three East titles in 4 years, but aches for more. |
| LSU | 24-10 | .706 | 39-12 | .765 | 1/1 | 3 | 4 | Take out 8-0 in '19: SEC mark is so-so .615. |
| Florida | 22-12 | .647 | 33-16 | .673 | 0/1 | 3 | 3 | Close in '20, but riding 3-game losing streak. |
| Texas A&M | 21-12 | .636 | 33-16 | .673 | 0/0 | 1 | 4 | Rising fast, but final step is the hardest. |
| Auburn | 21-13 | .618 | 33-18 | .648 | 0/1 | 1 | 4 | Harsin beware: 33-18 got Malzahn fired. |
| Kentucky | 16-18 | .471 | 30-20 | .600 | 0/0 | 0 | 4 | Getting comfortable in middle of the pack. |
| Missouri | 16-18 | .471 | 26-22 | .542 | 0/0 | 0 | 3 | Earned bowl but dropped out with virus. |
| South Carolina | 14-20 | .418 | 22-26 | .458 | 0/0 | 0 | 3 | Wait ... this trend ain't good (9, 7, 4, 2 wins) |
| Mississippi State | 14-20 | .412 | 27-23 | .540 | 0/0 | 0 | 4 | Snatched bowl at 3-7 after 22 teams opted out. |
| Ole Miss | 10-23 | .303 | 20-26 | .435 | 0/0 | 0 | 1 | Has taken big steps since '17-18 probation. |
| Tennessee | 10-24 | .294 | 20-27 | .426 | 0/0 | 0 | 1 | System failure ... rebooting. |
| Vanderbilt | 5-28 | .151 | 14-32 | .304 | 0/0 | 0 | 1 | 13 straight SEC losses, still 10 from record. |
| Arkansas | 4-30 | .118 | 11-35 | .306 | 0/0 | 0 | 1 | Invited to bowl at 3-7, but TCU got the virus. |

Beamer's staff.

LSU coach Ed Orgeron hired defensive coordinator Daronte Jones to replace Bo Pelini, who was a one-year disaster, and offensive coordinator Jake Peetz to replace Steve Ensminger, who retired from on-field coaching.

In all, the SEC had more than a dozen coordinator changes.

## SEC Leads In NFL Draft Picks Again

The SEC once again flexed its muscles during the 2021 NFL Draft, setting a record with 65 players selected, including 12 in the first round. Alabama had an SEC-record six selected in the first round.

It marked the 15th consecutive year the SEC has had the most players drafted.

Alabama had 10 overall draft picks, tying with Ohio State for the most. The Tide also had the most picks in 2018 and 2019. Georgia had a school-record nine selections.

Florida had eight, LSU seven, Kentucky six, and Missouri five, tying with Clemson, Oklahoma, North Carolina and Oregon.

At four were Auburn, Texas A&M and South Carolina. Ole Miss, Mississippi State and Tennessee had two each. Arkansas and Vanderbilt had one each as no SEC team was shut out of the draft.

OK, here's a surprise: For the first time in 15 years, no SEC defensive lineman was taken in the first round. And a tight end from the SEC was taken earlier than ever when Kyle Pitts of Florida was the No. 4 selection (the previous high was Alabama's O.J. Howard at No. 19). Yeah, it helped that Pitts is part receiver (and simply all-around awesome).

## Sec Will Lead In NFL Draft Picks Again

Consider this a headline from the future.

In a breakdown of 13 position groups tracked by NFL Draft Bible, an SEC player topped the early 2022 rankings for the NFL Draft at nearly half of the positions. They are:

- Running back: Georgia's Zamir White
- Tight end: Texas A&M's Jalen Wydermyer
- Offensive guard: Texas A&M's Kenyon Green
- Defensive tackle: Georgia's Jordan Davis
- Outside linebacker: Alabama's Christian Harris
- Cornerback: LSU's Derek Stingley Jr.

## All In Good Fun?

It's usually not wise to poke the bear.

In this case, the bear is Nick Saban, who just won his sixth national championship at Alabama.

Saban has never lost to one of his assistant coaches. Jimbo Fisher of Texas A&M hopes to be the first.

Fisher, who is 0-4 against Saban, just led the Aggies to a 9-1 record, a No. 4 ranking — the school's best since 1939.

In May, Fisher told the Touchdown Club of Houston that the Aggies were ready to "kick Saban's ass" — that despite losing to Alabama 52-24 last season.

When Saban was informed of Fisher's remark, Saban had a classic response: "In golf?"

## Non-Sec Schedule Intriges

After playing a 10-game all-SEC schedule, the Strength Everywhere Conference will play a number of non-conference games of national intrigue — many at neutral sites.

On Sept. 4, defending national champion Alabama will battle Miami in Atlanta; Georgia takes on Clemson in Charlotte; while LSU heads to the Rose Bowl to face UCLA. On Sept. 6, Ole Miss plays Louisville in Atlanta.

On Sept. 11, Texas A&M ventures to Denver to play Colorado; Arkansas hosts former Southwest Conference rival Texas; Mississippi State entertains North Carolina State and Tennessee welcomes Pitt.

On Sept. 18, Auburn makes a rare trip to the Northeast to play Penn State, and Stanford makes a rare trip to the South to play at Vanderbilt.

Other featured non-SEC games will be played the last weekend of the regular season: Florida State at Florida, Georgia at Georgia Tech, Kentucky at Louisville, and Clemson at South Carolina.

Another game of note: Liberty and former Ole Miss coach Hugh Freeze travel to Oxford to play the Rebels on Nov. 6.

## Sec QBS Are Hot

The SEC is better known for producing running backs, wide receivers and defensive players, but in the last three years, it has had more than its share of high-level quarterback picks.

In 2019, Drew Lock was a second-round pick.

In 2020, Joe Burrow was the No. 1 overall pick and Tua Tagovailoa was the fifth.

**Jimbo Fisher**

Photo by Gary Cosby Jr/The Tuscaloosa News via USA TODAY Sports

In 2021, Mac Jones went No. 15 overall, with Kyle Trask going in the second round and Kellen Mond going with the second pick of the third round.

That doesn't include three quarterbacks taken in the first two rounds who started their careers in the SEC: Justin Fields, Jalen Hurts and 2019 No. 1 overall pick Kyler Murray.

If you include those guys, then eight of the 15 quarterbacks who have been drafted in the first or second rounds since 2019 started at an SEC school.

If you're counting by where the player ended up, then the 15 drafted QBs break down like this:

- 5, SEC
- 2, ACC, Big Ten, Big 12
- 1, Pac-12, Mountain West, BYU, FCS

And the SEC quarterback pool might produce more first-rounders in 2022 — or at least one.

In early 2022 draft rankings published right after this year's draft, NFL Draft Bible has Georgia's JT Daniels rated as the No. 2 quarterback prospect. Others to watch are Matt Corral of Ole Miss, perhaps Myles Brennan at LSU (if he can hold off Max Johnson) ... and potentially even Bo Nix of Auburn.

What's more ...

Emory Jones of Florida is a top-flight athlete and should be productive. Alabama's Bryce Young is a gifted quarterback not eligible for the draft until 2023. Ken Seals set freshman passing records at Vanderbilt. Connor Bazelak hit over 67 percent of his passes as a freshman at Missouri.

# RATING THE SEC

## QUARTERBACKS

1. Georgia
2. Ole Miss
3. LSU
4. Alabama
5. Auburn
6. Florida
7. Missouri
8. Mississippi State
9. Tennessee
10. Texas A&M
11. Vanderbilt
12. South Carolina
13. Kentucky
14. Arkansas

Georgia was a different team when JT Daniels became the starting quarterback late last season. There's a big gap in his resume — standout freshman at Southern California in 2018, then that ACL injury in the Trojans' 2019 season-opener that cost him the starting job and prompted him to transfer — but he confirmed in November that he's still got it. Now Daniels is in a career sweet spot of having great experience/production and still a lot of room left to grow.

Year 2 of the Lane Kiffin era at Ole Miss should result in only more offense as his players now know what to expect. Matt Corral threw for 3,337 yards and 29 touchdowns in 10 games, helping him post an outstanding 182.2 passer rating. Now to improve on the 14 interceptions.

LSU gets a boost overall because of the Tigers' depth. Myles Brennan returns from injury, hoping to reclaim his spot by holding off Max Johnson, who led the Tigers to a pair of encouraging victories to end 2020.

Alabama, though, might have the most purely talented player in the league, with Bryce Young taking over. And Auburn's Bo Nix might finally have the right combo of athleticism, savvy and coaching to live up to his promise.

## RUNNING BACKS

1. Alabama
2. Georgia
3. Auburn
4. Texas A&M
5. South Carolina
6. Ole Miss
7. LSU
8. Kentucky
9. Florida
10. Arkansas
11. Mississippi State
12. Missouri
13. Tennessee
14. Vanderbilt

Najee Harris moved on from Alabama to the Pittsburgh Steelers as the 24th pick of the draft, but a succession plan at running back has never been a problem for coach Nick Saban. Brian Robinson Jr. is next up in the spotlight, but he will have to share. Keilan Robinson, Trey Sanders and hordes of others are more than capable of successfully toting the ball for the best team in America.

Georgia is another team that needs to expand its running back room to accommodate its constellation of stars. The backfield starts with Zamir White, who has 1,187 career yards with a 5.3-yard average and 14 TDs, and then there's James Cook, Kendall Milton and Kenny McIntosh. Legs for days.

Auburn's Tank Bigsby was the SEC Freshman of the Year after posting 834 yards (6.0-yard average), showing toughness, quick cuts and versatility. He is complemented by Shaun Shivers.

The depth of the position in the league is apparent that we just now get to Texas A&M's Isaiah Spiller and South Carolina's Kevin Harris, each of whom posted 1,000-yard seasons in the somewhat-abbreviated 2020 season. The only other rusher in the SEC to reach that level last season was Alabama's Harris.

## RECEIVERS

1. Alabama
2. LSU
3. Georgia
4. Ole Miss
5. Texas A&M
6. Florida
7. Arkansas
8. Mississippi State
9. Kentucky
10. Missouri
11. Auburn
12. Vanderbilt
13. Tennessee
14. South Carolina

Four first-round picks over the last two years should have decimated Alabama's receiving corps. It did not. John Metchie III caught 55 passes for 916 yards and six touchdowns last season, and he's joined by a stellar group of freshman receivers that includes Agiye Hall, Ja'Corey Brooks, Christian Leary and JoJo Earle. Jameson Williams also transferred in from Ohio State.

LSU also is in plug-and-play mode at receiver as Kayshon Boutte showed his potential with 527 receiving yards and four touchdowns on 27 catches — all in the final three games of his freshman season. LSU also returns Jaray Jenkins and Jontre Kirklin, plus the usual top-notch group of prospects.

Georgia lost George Pickens for the season with a torn ACL, but is still deep in talent. It starts with Kearis Jackson and Jermaine Burton, and Dominick Blaylock is back after missing the 2020 season due to his second ACL injury. Basically, this is a strong rotation with numerous options.

Lane Kiffin may no longer have Elijah Moore, but he has three solid contributors returning, led by Dontario Drummond (25 receptions for 417 yards and seven touchdowns), and deep threat Braylon Sanders (15 catches, 376 yards, four TDs).

## OFFENSIVE LINE

1. LSU
2. Georgia
3. Alabama
4. Kentucky
5. Auburn
6. Ole Miss
7. Mississippi State
8. Arkansas
9. Florida
10. Texas A&M
11. Missouri
12. South Carolina
13. Tennessee
14. Vanderbilt

It all looks good on paper for LSU, although the Tigers are seeking much better results on the field in 2021. We believe in the projections and consider that the talent remains, as LSU returns all five starters, led by Austin Deculus, Ed Ingram and Dare Rosenthal. Another important piece is Liam Shanahan, a Harvard grad transfer who now has an SEC season under his belt at center.

Georgia brings back lots of talent, and now its up to Kirby Smart and crew to make it all fit. Jamaree Salyer is the returning left tackle, but he might slide inside, which is likely his best spot. Warren McClendon was a Freshman All-American at right tackle and Xavier Truss started in the Peach Bowl. The Bulldogs also have prize prospects Broderick Jones and Amarius Mims.

Alabama lost a trio to the NFL, yet Evan Neal, who is moving from right tackle to left, will be an early favorite for national honors before he likely cashes a ticket as a 2022 first-rounder. Prized newcomers opened eyes in the spring.

Kentucky's "Big Blue Wall" is fortified by the return of All-American Darian Kinnard, switching from right tackle to left.

## PLAYERS TO WATCH

**CHRISTIAN HARRIS**
Pos: LB Ht: 6-2 Wt: 232

**CADE YORK**
Pos: K Ht: 6-1 Wt: 198

## DEFENSIVE LINE

1. Alabama
2. Georgia
3. LSU
4. Texas A&M
5. Missouri
6. South Carolina
7. Florida
8. Kentucky
9. Auburn
10. Ole Miss
11. Mississippi State
12. Tennessee
13. Arkansas
14. Vanderbilt

This is no exaggeration: As most programs struggle to field five quality defensive linemen, Alabama could go five deep — seriously. With the help of LaBryan Ray, who missed most of last season with a foot injury, the Crimson Tide aims to be more physical in the trenches, and will be with the likes of DJ Dale, Justin Eboigbe, Byron Young, Phidarian Mathis, Jamil Burroughs ... we could go on. Almost forgot: The player to watch is Tim Smith.

For Georgia's great run defense (two years in a row of leading the nation), star nose tackle Jordan Davis is back, with Travon Walker the best pass rusher on the end. DeVonte Wyatt's return in the interior solidifies the unit. The Bulldogs have good depth as well.

At LSU, the question isn't if the defensive line has improved, it's how much? All four starters return. The strength of the unit are ends, with Ali Gaye and Andre Anthony as pass rushers. Sophomore BJ Ojulari is right behind them. Glen Logan and Neil Farrell will be challenged in the interior by Maason Smith and others.

Jimbo Fisher continues to upgrade the line play at Texas A&M, with this year's unit led by DeMarvin Leal.

## LINEBACKERS

1. Alabama
2. Georgia
3. Auburn
4. Arkansas
5. Florida
6. LSU
7. Mississippi State
8. Ole Miss
9. Kentucky
10. Texas A&M
11. Missouri
12. South Carolina
13. Tennessee
14. Vanderbilt

Nick Saban is collecting star linebackers in 2021 like he collects national championship rings. He never has enough. The Tide was not desperate to add Tennessee transfer Henry To'o To'o, but when he decided to move to Tuscaloosa in early May, he improved what was already the most impressive group of linebackers in the whole USA. Leading the way are two *Lindy's* preseason All-Americans (Christian Harris and Will Anderson Jr.), along with 2020 second-team All-SEC Christopher Allen.

For Georgia, junior Nakobe Dean is the key man in the middle, the team's leading tackler with 71 in 10 games last season. Adam Anderson, who had 6.5 sacks, is still Georgia's best pass-rusher, but is looking to become a more impactful every-down linebacker. Nolan Smith, one of the SEC's best off the edge, is poised for a big season, too.

Even with K.J. Britt of the NFL, Auburn figures to be improved. The Tigers are led by Owen Pappoe, who had 93 tackles, including six for a loss and four sacks, last season. Outside linebacker Zakoby McClain led the SEC with 113 tackles, including 5.5 for a loss and three sacks.

Arkansas has standouts Grant Morgan and Bumper Pool.

## SECONDARY

1. LSU
2. Alabama
3. Texas A&M
4. Florida
5. Georgia
6. Auburn
7. Arkansas
8. Mississippi State
9. Kentucky
10. Missouri
11. Ole Miss
12. Tennessee
13. South Carolina
14. Vanderbilt

Derek Stingley Jr. and Eli Ricks figure to be the best pair of cornerbacks in college football. Stingley wasn't 100 percent in 2020, while Ricks picked off four passes as a true freshman. At safety, LSU will need true freshman Sage Ryan to grow up quickly after dual-sport standout Maurice Hampton decided to focus solely on baseball.

Alabama returns everyone in the secondary — with one huge exception: first-round cornerback Patrick Surtain II. Cornerback Josh Jobe will step into a larger leadership role after breaking up 11 passes last season, while Jalyn Armour-Davis tries to hold off top prospect Ga'Quincy "Kool-Aid" McKinstry at the other corner. The Tide is flush with safety-types (Jordan Battle, Brian Branch, Malachi Moore, DeMarcco Hellams) who could all be elite at some point.

Texas A&M has a lot of experience on the back end, especially with safeties Leon O'Neal Jr. and Demani Richardson — also known as big hitters — and senior reserve Keldrick Carper. At corner, Myles Jones is coming off his best season yet.

Florida lost a lot in the secondary and has new position coaches as well, but most secondaries would be so lucky as to be led by talented cornerback Kaiir Elam.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

1. LSU
2. Georgia
3. Auburn
4. Alabama
5. Missouri
6. Tennessee
7. Texas A&M
8. South Carolina
9. Mississippi State
10. Ole Miss
11. Kentucky
12. Florida
13. Vanderbilt
14. Arkansas

LSU leads the list on the strength of Cade York's strong right leg, which boots field goals of 50-plus yards better than anybody in the country. But the Tigers have more than that, separating themselves from the SEC pack with return specialists Trey Palmer and Derek Stingley Jr.

Georgia punter Jake Camarda averaged 46.6 yards last season on his way to being one of three finalists for the Ray Guy Award. Kicker Jack Podlesny made 13 of 16 field-goal attempts, his last one coming from 53 yards with three seconds left to beat Cincinnati, 24-21, in the Peach Bowl. The Dawgs' return game is more than on-point, too.

All Anders Carlson does at Auburn is keep making field goals. He was 20 of 22 last season to boost his career total to 53 makes. Alabama special teams remain strong with Will Reichard (14 of 14 on FGs, 84 of 84 on PATs) last season and all kinds of athletes to deploy on returns and on the coverage units.

Missouri returns punter Grant McKinnis (43.1-yard average), kicker Harrison Mevis (17-for-20 on field goal attempts, including four over 50 yards), and kickoff specialist Sean Koetting (only six of 52 kickoffs returned).

# ALABAMA CRIMSON TIDE

For more coverage of the Crimson Tide, visit alabama.247Sports.com

**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Bill O'Brien **DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Pete Golding **STADIUM:** Bryant-Denny Stadium: 101,821

## FOLLOWING 'THE PROCESS' HAS BAMA ON NO. 1 PATH

All things considered, the 2020 season could not have gone much better for Alabama. A national title in an undefeated season. Six first-team All-Americans. Three Heisman Trophy finalists, including the winner, leading a loooong list of individual awards bestowed on Crimson Tide players.

Of course, none of that matters to Nick Saban — nor he hopes, to his current players. The Crimson Tide coach did celebrate those accomplishments for a day or two, but then he wiped the slate clean and started work on 2021.

That's the culture Saban has created — win, recruit, reload, repeat. As he enters his 15th season with the Crimson Tide he continues to lean on "The Process" he has preached since he arrived in 2007. It's all about maintaining poise, excellence and staying focused on the task at hand.

"He does that better than anyone," said tight end Miller Forristall in the days leading up to last season's national championship game in Miami. "Nobody does it more consistently than Coach Saban."

That's an understatement. Even before Saban arrived in Tuscaloosa, the Bear Bryant-dominated Alabama history was arguably the grandest in college football. Yet...

• National Championships: In 117 seasons of Alabama football, the Crimson Tide has won 18 national championships — 12 in the 103 years before Saban, six (matching Bryant's total) in the 14 years since.

• Heisman Trophy: In the 71 years the Heisman Trophy was awarded before his tenure, Alabama had never won one. In the past 14 years, the Tide has three winners and five other top-five finalists.

• All-Americans: A total of 140 Alabama players have earned first-team All-America recognition (dating to 1915), with 57 of them under Saban, including a record-tying six in 2021.

• NFL Draft: Since Bear Bryant himself was a fourth-round selection in the first NFL draft in 1936, Alabama has had 75 players picked in the first round — 36 of those between 1936 and 2007, and 39 since then — 2.8 per year, with six in 2021. Overall, 106 Alabama players under Saban have been drafted (7.6 per year).

• NFL rosters: According to the NCAA, there were 56 players on active 2020 rosters. That's six more than Ohio State, 27 more than Clemson, and (for those counting) 31 more than Auburn.

None of that matters to the coach heading into 2021. It's all about "what's next?"

There is plenty of work to do in 2021. Key players on offense must be replaced and young, relatively untested players will be thrust into starting jobs.

But don't expect the offense to change dramatically just because Bill O'Brien takes over as offensive coordinator. Alabama will still use a strong run attack to complement a spread passing game built on speed.

Half of the Crimson Tide's No. 1-ranked recruiting class was on campus for the start of spring practice, with several already making an impact and battling for starting roles.

Based on Saban's approach and the talent he continues to bring in, Alabama could rack up more hardware, including national title No. 19.

## OFFENSE

The good news is there is no debate surrounding the starting quarterback. The bad news is sophomore Bryce Young has never started a game.

Still, Young is more mobile in the pocket than his predecessor, Mac Jones, is much faster afoot, and has a first-rate arm.

A big void is left at receiver with the loss of DeVonta Smith and speedster Jaylen Waddle, who accounted for half the receiving yards and more than half the touchdowns.

Agiye Hall, Christian Leary and Ja'Corey Brooks were early enrollees and impressive in the spring. Javon Baker and Xavier Williams saw limited action as backups and should have increased roles. Ohio State transfer Jameson Williams was a big pickup over the summer, too.

The starters are John Metchie III, who had just over 900 yards and six touchdowns, and Slade Bolden, who is due for a breakout season. Thaiu Jones-Bell and

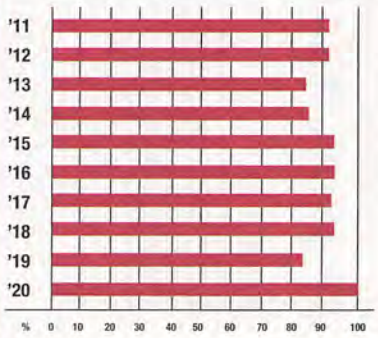
## SCHEDULE

| Date | Opponent | '20 Record |
|---|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | vs. Miami (Atlanta, GA) | 8-3 |
| Sept. 11 | MERCER | 5-6 |
| Sept. 18 | at Florida | 8-4 |
| Sept. 25 | SOUTHERN MISS | 3-7 |
| Oct. 2 | OLE MISS | 5-5 |
| Oct. 9 | at Texas A&M | 9-1 |
| Oct. 16 | at Mississippi State | 4-7 |
| Oct. 23 | TENNESSEE | 3-7 |
| Nov. 6 | LSU | 5-5 |
| Nov. 13 | NEW MEXICO STATE | 1-1 |
| Nov. 20 | ARKANSAS | 3-7 |
| Nov. 27 | at Auburn | 6-5 |

## RESULTS

| | 13-0, 10-0 | |
|---|---|---|
| W | at Missouri | 38-19 |
| W | TEXAS A&M | 52-24 |
| W | at Ole Miss | 63-48 |
| W | GEORGIA | 41-24 |
| W | at Tennessee | 48-17 |
| W | MISSISSIPPI STATE | 41-0 |
| W | KENTUCKY | 63-3 |
| W | AUBURN | 42-13 |
| W | at LSU | 55-17 |
| W | at Arkansas | 52-3 |
| | **SEC CHAMPIONSHIP** | |
| W | vs. Florida | 52-46 |
| | **CFP SEMIFINAL GAME** | |
| W | vs. Notre Dame | 31-14 |
| | **NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP GAME** | |
| W | vs. Ohio State | 52-24 |

## 10-YEAR WINNING TREND



## AT A GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Tuscaloosa, Ala.

**2020:** 13-0 overall, 10-0 SEC (1st, West)

**COACH:** Nick Saban — At Alabama: 165-23, 14 years; overall: 256-65-1, 25 years

**RETURNING STARTERS:** 13; 3 offense, 8 defense, kicker, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:**
QB Bryce Young, RB Brian Robinson Jr., RB Trey Sanders, WR John Metchie III, TE Jahleel Billingsley, DL LaBryan Ray, LB Christian Harris, LB Will Anderson Jr., CB Josh Jobe

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:**
Talent. Alabama always manages to plug holes with some of the top players in the country. The defense is packed with high-caliber returning starters, and the offense has a bevy of playmakers waiting to show off their skills.

**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:**
Youth. It's fine to have a supply of five-star players, but experienced ones are better when making championship runs. It wasn't an issue on defense last season with several true freshmen starting, but the turnover on offense, particularly at the skill positions, could be cause for concern.

**KEY LOSSES:**
QB Mac Jones, RB Najee Harris, WR DeVonta Smith, WR Jaylen Waddle, OL Alex Leatherwood, OL Landon Dickerson, OL Deonte Brown, DL Christian Barmore, CB Patrick Surtain II

**KEY NUMBER:**
**55** Combined touchdowns for Najee Harris and DeVonta Smith last season. Alabama must establish new "go-to" guys in 2021.

DB
Josh
JOBE
Photo by AP Photo/Michael Ainsworth

WR
**John Metchie**
Photo by Michael Wade

## SCOUTING REPORT: Offense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | Bryce Young | So. | No career starts, but already has Heisman buzz. | Paul Tyson, So. |
| RB | Brian Robinson Jr. | Sr. | Bell-cow back or will he split carries? | Trey Sanders, So. |
| WR | **John Metchie III*** | Jr. | Should be among the top receivers nationally. | Xavier Williams, Jr. |
| WR | Slade Bolden | Jr. | Will have bigger role in Bill O'Brien's offense. | Traeshon Holden, So. |
| WR | Javon Baker | So. | Former 4-star will try to hold off plenty of competition. | Agiye Hall, Fr. |
| TE | Jahleel Billingsley | Jr. | Could be a premier player at well-stocked position. | Major Tennison, Sr. |
| LT | **Evan Neal*** | Jr. | Slides over from RT to protect QB's blind side. | Chris Owens, Sr. |
| LG | Tommy Brown | Jr. | First-year starter, but among biggest UA linemen. | Pierce Quick, So. |
| C | Chris Owens | Sr. | Filled in during the playoffs for Rimington winner Dickerson. | Darian Dalcourt, So. |
| RG | **Emil Ekiyor Jr.*** | Jr. | Returning starter from Joe Moore Award-winning line. | Amari Kight, So. |
| RT | Javion Cohen | So. | All-SEC Freshman team selection last year. | JC Latham, Fr. |
| PK | **Will Reichard*** | Jr. | Perfect on extra points and field goals last year. | Chase Allen, So. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

## SCOUTING REPORT: Defense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | LaBryan Ray | Sr. | The big missing piece from 2020 after injury. | Byron Young, Jr. |
| DT | **DJ Dale*** | Jr. | Big presence in the middle since he was a freshman. | Tim Smith, So. |
| DE | **Justin Eboigbe*** | Jr. | Will be the most improved player on the line. | Phidarian Mathis, Sr. |
| LB | **Christopher Allen*** | Sr. | Led the SEC in tackles for loss (13). | King Mwikuta, Jr. |
| LB | **Christian Harris*** | Jr. | Should be All-American, improve NFL draft stock. | Demouy Kennedy, So. |
| LB | Henry To'o To'o | Jr. | Tennessee transfer adds to LB riches | LB Jaylen Moody, Sr. |
| LB | **Will Anderson Jr.*** | So. | Phenomenal freshman season with seven sacks. | Drew Sanders, So. |
| CB | **Josh Jobe*** | Sr. | Most experienced defensive back, 11 pass breakups in '20. | Malachi Moore, So. |
| CB | Jalyn Armour-Davis | Jr. | Big shoes to fill, excellent footwork skills. | Marcus Banks, Jr. |
| SS | **Jordan Battle*** | Jr. | New leader of the secondary, third on team in tackles. | Brian Branch, So. |
| FS | DeMarcco Hellams | Jr. | Solid tackler; stepped up big in three starts. | **Daniel Wright, Sr.*** |
| P | **Charlie Scott*** | Sr. | Brother of Green Bay Packers punter JK Scott. | Jack Martin, Jr. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

Traeshon Holden are up-and-coming sophomores who will contribute.

Brian Robinson Jr. takes over as the primary running back and will get the majority of touches, but watch for a platoon of ball carriers. After missing the 2020 season, Keilan Robinson is back and could see a lot of touches — particularly after the way he impressed Saban in the spring.

Trey Sanders has had a rough time with injuries, missing all of 2019 and playing just four games in 2020. Jase McClellan and Roydell Williams saw action as true freshmen and are poised to be big-time players for the next three years.

Alabama rotates several tight ends, and could have more than one on the field more frequently with the talent on hand. Jahleel Billingsley turned heads late in the season and could be an All-SEC player. Cameron Latu's 6-5, 250-pound frame and big hands make him a primary weapon. Major Tennison is noted for his blocking ability.

The offensive line is undergoing a shake-up. Evan Neal is back but will slide over to left tackle. Tommy Brown should get the nod at left guard. Chris Owens takes over at center but can also play guard and tackle. Emil Ekiyor Jr. is a returning starter at right guard, while Javion Cohen leads the candidates at right tackle.

And don't be surprised if freshmen JC Latham or Tommy Brockermeyer find their way onto the field before too long.

## DEFENSE

By Alabama standards it was an off year for the defense, even though the Tide won the national championship while allowing 19.4 and 352.2 yards per game.

Pete Golding is still in charge of the defense, and despite the annual migration of talent to the NFL, this looks like a group that could resemble a traditional, hard-nosed Alabama defense.

There were no issues in stopping the run last year, as opponents managed just 113.1 yards rushing. Expect that number to shrink as the entire defensive line returns.

Defensive end LaBryan Ray missed half of last season with an injury but is back as the vocal and physical leader. His presence makes a huge difference. DJ Dale was solid at nose tackle and Justin Eboigbe earned his way into the starting lineup and could have a breakout season. Phidarian Mathis, Byron Young and Tim Smith all will see action as well.

The crew of linebackers is also impressive, particularly with the addition of Tennessee transfer Henry To'o To'o. Three-year starter Christian Harris is the alpha dog of the group, and Will Anderson Jr. burst onto the scene last season, starting every game as a freshman. He has a wicked first step and gets to the ball carrier quickly (10.5 tackles for loss).

Christopher Allen will be a three-year starter and adds extra experience to an already high-IQ linebacking corps. Sophomores Drew Sanders and Chris Braswell are the next rising stars. Sanders was the solid backup for Anderson and a contributor on special teams.

## TOP 5 NFL PROSPECTS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1. LaBryan Ray** | **DE** | **6-5** | **295** | **4.95** | **Sr.** |

Physically strong and able to be dominant at times in the SEC, Ray boasts an impressive resume. His most productive season was in 2018 as a sophomore when he played in 15 games, totaling 39 tackles with2.5 sacks and six tackles for a loss. Ray was limited to just seven games last year, registering 12 tackles. He plays to the whistle and has good pursuit, along with the kind of twitch that NFL scouts love.

Injuries have severely hampered his effectiveness, including much of 2019 with an ankle injury. But when healthy, there is a serious argument for him being one of the top pass rushers in college football. If he can stay healthy, Ray will elevate high into the first-round mix. While he needs to work on his hand combat and develop some more nuances to his pass rush, Ray possesses the prototypical length and necessary attributes to be a high impact player at the next level.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2. John Metchie III** | **WR** | **6-0** | **195** | **4.48** | **Jr.** |
| **3. Evan Neal** | **OT** | **6-7** | **360** | **5.38** | **Jr.** |
| **4. Justin Eboigbe** | **DE** | **6-5** | **285** | **4.90** | **Jr.** |
| **5. Christian Harris** | **LB** | **6-2** | **232** | **4.67** | **Jr.** |

— Ric Serritella, NFL Draft Bible

The big issue in 2020 was pass defense, allowing nearly 240 yards per game. On the plus side, though, Alabama had three pick-sixes while matching a national-best four defensive touchdowns.

Ballhawks and playmakers are deep in the secondary. Josh Jobe (11 pass breakups) could make a push as an All-American at cornerback, and Malachi Moore (three interceptions) had a stellar freshman season at the Star position. Strong safety Jordan Battle is the most seasoned starter.

Two players to keep an eye on are cornerback Jalyn Armour-Davis and free safety DeMarco Hellams. Davis received glowing praise in the spring, and Hellams figures to be among the top players in tackles and pass defense.

Brian Branch and Daniel Wright had big roles off the bench and could move up to a starting role at some point. Ronald Williams Jr. missed most of the season with an injury, but could see action, too.

Marcus Banks and Brandon Turnage are solid backups and proved they are ready for more playing time.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Field goals are a touchy subject among the Alabama fanbase. Fourth down inside the 30-yard line has been a source of anxiety for a number of years, but Will Reichard assuaged those fears in 2020, making every one of his 14 field goal attempts and hitting all 84 PATs.

The punting situation has been fluid the past two seasons. Charlie Scott took over the starting role midway through the season and averaged a respectable 39.2 yards a punt, considering that only three of his 22 punts were returned at all (for 15, 2 and 3 yards). Troy transfer Jack Martin (46.1 yards per punt) will also be a factor.

Slade Bolden split time at punt returner and should start the season. But don't be surprised to see Keilan Robinson or 5-star talent Ga'Quincy McKinstry or Kristian Story in the mix.

Alabama also has to break in a new long snapper.

**LB Will Anderson Jr.**

Photo by James D. Smith via AP

## SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

After an all-SEC schedule last season, college football returns to normal slates, and for Alabama that means a date with Miami in Atlanta. The real work starts in September at Florida in a rematch of the SEC title game. Back-to-back road games with Texas A&M and Mississippi State in October will be a good indicator of Alabama's mettle. The Tide gets a break before hosting LSU in November. The finale is at Auburn, where Bama has lost two straight.

— Edwin Stanton

### 2018 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 45.6 | 3 |
| Rushing | 198.4 | 42 |
| Passing | 323.6 | 6 |
| Total | 522.0 | 6 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 18.1 | 12 |
| Rushing | 121.3 | 19 |
| Passing | 198.3 | 33 |
| Total | 319.5 | 16 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 6 | + 0.40 | 34 |

### 2019 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 47.2 | 2 |
| Rushing | 168.5 | 56 |
| Passing | 342.2 | 3 |
| Total | 510.8 | 6 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 18.6 | 13 |
| Rushing | 137.2 | T-37 |
| Passing | 187.2 | 11 |
| Total | 324.5 | 20 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 18 | + 1.38 | 3 |

### 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 48.5 | 2 |
| Rushing | 183.5 | 47 |
| Passing | 358.2 | 3 |
| Total | 541.6 | 4 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 19.4 | 13 |
| Rushing | 113.1 | 17 |
| Passing | 239.2 | 70 |
| Total | 352.2 | 32 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 10 | + 0.77 | 18 |

# NOTEBOOK

Linebacker **Will Anderson Jr.** was a beast as a freshman last season, registering seven sacks and 10.5 tackles for a loss, both second on the team.

That got him tagged with a nickname "The Terminator" by then-offensive coordinator **Steve Sarkisian**.

Anderson didn't understand the reference at first, considering Arnold Schwarzenegger's breakout film first came out nearly two decades before he was born.

"I'm kind of ashamed because I never really watched the movie," Anderson said. "But I like the name, it's a good name. People told me the meaning of it and I was like, 'OK, it can stay.'"

• Having **Bill O'Brien** as the offensive coordinator is good news for receiver **Slade Bolden**. O'Brien was with the New England Patriots for four years, including offensive coordinator in 2011. He worked with skilled receivers **Wes Welker** and **Julian Edelman**.

Bolden has often been compared to those two ex-Patriot greats, and the junior even talked with O'Brien about it after O'Brien arrived with the Crimson Tide.

"He mentioned some things like that — working with those guys back in New England, and he does see a little of those skillsets with me," Bolden said. "So, there are some attributes that he can put in the offense and hopefully help me … be able to get open, different routes and stuff like that."

• Alabama wasted no time in benefiting from the NCAA's new one-time transfer rule, allowing athletes to transfer and be eligible immediately.

Receiver **Jameson Williams** transferred in from Ohio State and will battle for playing time in the fall. Tennessee linebacker **Henry To'o To'o** (76 tackles, 10 tackles for loss) was another major addition after spring workouts.

"We are going to adapt to it and take advantage of it for us," coach **Nick Saban** said. "We will only look for transfers that are going to help our team be better."

• Saban said he is not too concerned about players leaving Alabama: "I don't think we're going to have our best players on our team want to leave Alabama. Most guys that have left here call back 100 times wanting to come back."

# OPPOSING COACHES VIEW

• "Alabama did lose a lot, but this is what I see at Alabama: They didn't lose Nick Saban and that's the key to the drill. They always lose offensive coordinators, but only one didn't win an SEC Championship or play for a national championship. My point is, with Nick Saban back, Alabama is still Alabama. The players change, the offensive coordinators change, the defensive coordinators change, but they still have Nick. …

• "Christian Harris is a freak athlete. He's the best linebacker in the country. And Will Anderson is an unbelievable kid and an unbelievable player. They could win the Nagurski and Butkus awards. …

• "The offense keeps getting better and better and they play at a high level. And now they have Bill O'Brien (as OC) who is a brilliant mind. And Doug Marrone on the offensive line. I bet it's never happened in college where a school had two offensive coaches who were former NFL head coaches."

# CRIMSON TIDE SPRING ROSTER

| Quarterback | | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | Braxton Barker | QB | 6-1 | 202 | Jr. | Birmingham |
| 16 | Jayden George | QB | 6-3 | 192 | So. | Indianapolis, IN |
| 19 | Stone Hollenbach | QB | 6-3 | 208 | So. | Catawissa, PA |
| 15 | Jalen Milroe | QB | 6-2 | 201 | Fr. | Katy, TX |
| 17 | Paul Tyson | QB | 6-5 | 228 | So. | Trussville |
| 9 | Bryce Young | QB | 6-0 | 194 | So. | Pasadena, CA |
| **Running Back** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 35 | Cooper Bishop | RB | 6-0 | 195 | So. | Vestavia Hills |
| 27 | Kyle Edwards | RB | 6-0 | 209 | So. | Destrehan, LA |
| 21 | Jase McClellan | RB | 5-11 | 212 | So. | Aledo, TX |
| 4 | Brian Robinson Jr. | RB | 6-1 | 228 | Sr. | Tuscaloosa |
| 2 | Keilan Robinson | RB | 5-9 | 190 | Jr. | Washington, DC |
| 6 | Trey Sanders | RB | 6-0 | 214 | So. | Port Saint Joe, FL |
| 23 | Roydell Williams | RB | 5-10 | 210 | So. | Hueytown |
| **Wide Receivers** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 5 | Javon Baker | WR | 6-2 | 195 | So. | Atlanta, GA |
| 25 | Jonathan Bennett | WR | 5-8 | 178 | So. | Birmingham |
| 18 | Slade Bolden | WR | 5-11 | 191 | Jr. | West Monroe, LA |
| 36 | Bret Bolin | WR | 6-0 | 176 | Sr. | Lemont, IL |
| 7 | Ja'Corey Brooks | WR | 6-2 | 190 | Fr. | Miami, FL |
| 17 | Agiye Hall | WR | 6-3 | 195 | Fr. | Valrico, FL |
| 11 | Traeshon Holden | WR | 6-3 | 208 | So. | Kissimmee, FL |
| 14 | Thaiu Jones-Bell | WR | 6-0 | 190 | So. | Hallandale, FL |
| 89 | Grant Krieger | WR | 6-2 | 192 | Jr. | Pittsburgh, PA |
| 84 | Joshua Lanier | WR | 5-11 | 160 | Sr. | Tuscaloosa |
| 12 | Christian Leary | WR | 5-10 | 185 | Fr. | Orlando, FL |
| 8 | John Metchie III | WR | 6-0 | 195 | Jr. | Brampton, CAN |
| 32 | C.J. Williams | WR | 5-10 | 159 | So. | Gallion |
| 31 | Shatarius Williams | WR | 6-3 | 187 | So. | Demopolis |
| 3 | Xavier Williams | WR | 6-1 | 190 | Jr. | Hollywood, FL |
| 37 | Sam Willoughby | WR | 5-10 | 165 | So. | Vestavia Hills |
| **Tight Ends** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 60 | Kendall Randolph | TE/OL | 6-4 | 298 | Sr. | Madison |
| 19 | Jahleel Billingsley | TE | 6-4 | 230 | Jr. | Chicago, IL |
| 46 | Melvin Billingsley | TE | 6-3 | 230 | Sr. | Opelika |
| 87 | Caden Clark | TE | 6-4 | 258 | Fr. | Akron, OH |
| 43 | Robert Ellis | TE | 6-0 | 220 | So. | Enterprise |
| 83 | Richard Hunt | TE | 6-7 | 235 | So. | Memphis, TN |
| 81 | Cameron Latu | TE | 6-5 | 250 | Jr. | Salt Lake City, UT |
| 45 | Robbie Ouzts | TE | 6-4 | 260 | Fr. | Rock Hill, SC |
| 44 | Charlie Skehan | TE | 6-1 | 232 | So. | Columbia, SC |
| 88 | Major Tennison | TE | 6-5 | 252 | Sr. | Flint, TX |
| **Offensive Lineman** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 51 | Tanner Bowles | OL | 6-5 | 293 | So. | Glasgow, KY |
| 58 | James Brockermeyer | OL | 6-3 | 270 | Fr. | Fort Worth, TX |
| 76 | Tommy Brockermeyer | OL | 6-5 | 292 | Fr. | Fort Worth, TX |
| 75 | Tommy Brown | OL | 6-7 | 320 | Jr. | Santa Ana, CA |
| 70 | Javion Cohen | OL | 6-4 | 325 | So. | Phenix City |
| 71 | Darrian Dalcourt | OL | 6-3 | 300 | Jr. | Havre de Grace, MD |
| 55 | Emil Ekiyor Jr. | OL | 6-3 | 324 | Jr. | Indianapolis, IN |
| 69 | Terrence Ferguson II | OL | 6-4 | 290 | Fr. | Fort Valley, GA |
| 74 | Damieon George Jr. | OL | 6-6 | 345 | So. | Houston, TX |
| 67 | Donovan Hardin | OL | 6-3 | 285 | So. | Dublin, OH |
| 78 | Amari Kight | OL | 6-7 | 318 | So. | Alabaster |
| 65 | JC Latham | OL | 6-6 | 325 | Fr. | Oak Creek, WI |
| 56 | Seth McLaughlin | OL | 6-4 | 280 | So. | Buford, GA |
| 73 | Evan Neal | OL | 6-7 | 360 | Jr. | Okeechobee, FL |
| 79 | Chris Owens | OL | 6-3 | 315 | Sr. | Arlington, TX |
| 72 | Pierce Quick | OL | 6-5 | 280 | So. | Trussville |
| 62 | Jackson Roby | OL | 6-5 | 285 | Sr. | Huntsville |
| 68 | Alajujuan Sparks Jr. | OL | 6-4 | 345 | So. | Hoover |
| **Defensive Lineman** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 98 | Jamil Burroughs | DL | 6-3 | 326 | So. | Powder Springs, GA |
| 94 | DJ Dale | DL | 6-3 | 307 | Jr. | Birmingham |
| 92 | Justin Eboigbe | DL | 6-5 | 285 | Jr. | Forest Park, GA |
| 95 | Monkell Goodwine | DL | 6-4 | 278 | Fr. | Upper Marlboro, MD |
| 97 | LT Ikner | DL | 6-4 | 261 | Sr. | Daphne |
| 52 | Braylen Ingraham | DL | 6-4 | 289 | So. | Fort Lauderdale, FL |
| 93 | Jah-Marien Latham | DL | 6-3 | 285 | So. | Reform |
| 89 | Kyle Mann | DL | 6-0 | 270 | So. | Powder Springs, GA |
| 48 | Phidarian Mathis | DL | 6-4 | 312 | Sr. | Wisner, LA |
| 18 | LaBryan Ray | DL | 6-5 | 295 | Sr. | Madison |
| 50 | Tim Smith | DL | 6-4 | 320 | So. | Sebastian, FL |
| 90 | Stephon Wynn Jr. | DL | 6-4 | 310 | Jr. | Anderson, SC |
| 47 | Byron Young | DL | 6-3 | 292 | Jr. | Laurel, MS |
| **Linebackers** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 4 | Christopher Allen | LB | 6-4 | 252 | Sr. | Baton Rouge, LA |
| 31 | Will Anderson Jr. | LB | 6-4 | 235 | So. | Hampton, GA |
| 41 | Chris Braswell | LB | 6-3 | 220 | So. | Baltimore, MD |
| 33 | Jackson Bratton | LB | 6-3 | 225 | So. | Muscle Shoals |
| 54 | Kyle Flood Jr. | LB | 6-0 | 209 | So. | Middlesex, NJ |
| 8 | Christian Harris | LB | 6-2 | 232 | Jr. | Baton Rouge, LA |
| 36 | Ian Jackson | LB | 6-1 | 225 | Fr. | Prattville |
| 44 | Christian Johnson | LB | 6-5 | 230 | Fr. | Flowery Branch, GA |
| 53 | Kevin Justice | LB | 5-11 | 214 | Jr. | Delray Beach, FL |
| 37 | Demouy Kennedy | LB | 6-3 | 215 | So. | Theodore |
| 19 | Keanu Koht | LB | 6-4 | 215 | Fr. | Vero Beach, FL |
| 32 | Deontae Lawson | LB | 6-2 | 217 | Fr. | Mobile |
| 35 | Shane Lee | LB | 6-0 | 240 | Jr. | Burtonsville, MD |
| 42 | Jaylen Moody | LB | 6-2 | 225 | Sr. | Conway, SC |
| 30 | King Mwikuta | LB | 6-5 | 238 | Jr. | West Point, GA |
| 23 | Jarez Parks | LB | 6-4 | 240 | Jr. | Fellsmere, FL |
| 34 | Quandarrius Robinson | LB | 6-5 | 220 | So. | Birmingham |
| 20 | Drew Sanders | LB | 6-5 | 230 | So. | Denton, TX |
| 43 | Jordan Smith | LB | 5-10 | 210 | So. | Chelsea |
| 59 | Bennett Whisenhunt | LB | 6-1 | 222 | So. | Vestavia Hills |
| **Defensive Backs** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 5 | Jalyn Armour-Davis | DB | 6-1 | 192 | Jr. | Mobile |
| 26 | Marcus Banks | DB | 6-0 | 180 | Jr. | Houston, TX |
| 9 | Jordan Battle | DB | 6-1 | 210 | Jr. | Fort Lauderdale, FL |
| 14 | Brian Branch | DB | 6-0 | 190 | So. | Tyrone, GA |
| 25 | DJ Douglas | DB | 6-0 | 202 | So. | Montgomery |
| 38 | Jalen Edwards | DB | 6-0 | 177 | So. | Columbus, MS |
| 24 | Clark Griffin | DB | 5-9 | 195 | So. | Mountain Brook |
| 2 | DeMarcco Hellams | DB | 6-1 | 208 | Jr. | Washington, DC |
| 28 | Josh Jobe | DB | 6-1 | 192 | Sr. | Miami, FL |
| 49 | Julian Lowenstein | DB | 6-0 | 201 | So. | Sarasota, FL |
| 25 | Jacobi McBride | DB | 6-1 | 143 | So. | Madison |
| 1 | Ga'Quincy McKinstry | DB | 6-1 | 180 | Fr. | Birmingham |
| 13 | Malachi Moore | DB | 6-0 | 182 | So. | Trussville |
| 42 | Sam Reed | DB | 6-1 | 165 | Jr. | Mountain Brook |
| 21 | Jahquez Robinson | DB | 6-2 | 190 | So. | Jacksonville, FL |
| 27 | Joshua Robinson | DB | 5-9 | 180 | Sr. | Hoover |
| 11 | Kristian Story | DB | 6-1 | 215 | So. | Lanett |
| 39 | Carson Ware | DB | 6-1 | 190 | So. | Muscle Shoals |
| 22 | Ronald Williams Jr. | DB | 6-2 | 190 | Sr. | Ferriday, LA |
| 3 | Daniel Wright | DB | 6-1 | 195 | Sr. | Fort Lauderdale, FL |
| **Specialist** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 82 | Chase Allen | PK | 6-2 | 188 | So. | Colleyville, TX |
| 59 | Jake Hall | SN | 6-3 | 238 | Jr. | Saraland |
| 98 | Sam Johnson | P | 6-3 | 215 | So. | Birmingham |
| 95 | Jack Martin | P | 6-0 | 206 | Jr. | Mobile |
| 99 | Ty Perine | P/PK | 6-1 | 218 | Jr. | Prattville |
| 50 | Gabe Pugh | SN | 6-5 | 273 | So. | Tuscaloosa |
| 16 | Will Reichard | PK | 6-1 | 190 | Jr. | Hoover |
| 85 | Charlie Scott | P | 6-1 | 195 | Sr. | Greenwood Village, CO |

# INDIVIDUAL STATS

## PASSING

| Name | GP | Effic | Cmp | Att | Int | Pct | Yards | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| M. Jones | 13 | 203.1 | 311 | 402 | 4 | 77.4 | 4500 | 41 | 90 | 346.2 |
| B. Young | 9 | 133.7 | 13 | 22 | 0 | 59.1 | 156 | 1 | 35 | 17.3 |

## RECEIVING

| RECEIVING | GP | No. | Yards | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| D. Smith | 13 | 117 | 1856 | 15.9 | 23 | 66 | 142.8 |
| J. Metchie | 13 | 55 | 916 | 16.7 | 6 | 78 | 70.5 |
| J. Waddle | 6 | 28 | 591 | 21.1 | 4 | 90 | 98.5 |

## RUSHING

| RUSHING | GP | Att. | Gain | Loss | Net | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| N. Harris | 13 | 251 | 1487 | 21 | 1466 | 5.8 | 26 | 53 | 112.8 |
| B. Robinson Jr. | 13 | 91 | 490 | 7 | 483 | 5.3 | 6 | 21 | 37.2 |
| J. McClellan | 12 | 23 | 245 | 0 | 245 | 10.7 | 2 | 80 | 20.4 |

## DEF. LEADERS

Tackles: D. Moses 80, C. Harris 79, J. Battle 66
Tackles for loss: C. Allen 13, W. Anderson Jr. 10.5, C. Barmore 9.5
Sacks: C. Barmore 8, W. Anderson Jr. 7, C. Allen 6
Interceptions: M.Moore 3, D. Wright 2, B. Branch 2, 5 tied with 1

# 247SPORTS CRIMSON TIDE RECRUITING 2021

## 3 NEWCOMERS OF IMPACT

### JC Latham

Alabama will be in need of some competition at the offensive tackle position, and Latham was as good as anyone at that spot on the prep level. He will have the chance to come in and compete for immediate playing time. Latham has only played football for a short amount of time compared to others, but he has shown tremendous improvement each year. Tommy Brockermeyer falls into this same category.

### Jacorey Brooks

Alabama had a nice haul of wide receivers, but Brooks could be the one to jump on the field the quickest. He's an early enrollee with big size and a polished presence. There will be competition from other freshmen — especially Jojo Earle and Agiye Hall — so the battle to get on the field early could be one of the most interesting ones this year.

### GaQuincy McKinstry

The five-star cornerback will make a run at playing in a talented Alabama secondary. He was an early enrollee and one of the more athletically gifted players in Alabama's class. Many thought he could be a college wide receiver, but he has a knack for finding the ball at the corner position and turning it into instant offense.

## SLEEPER

### Terrence Ferguson

Not sure you can call a nationally ranked top-60 player a sleeper, but Terrence Ferguson doesn't get talked about enough either way. The Georgia native got lost in a loaded offensive line class, but he might have as much upside as any in the group. He is capable of playing multiple positions, and Ferguson was a two-way star in high school.

## 2022 NEEDS

Nick Saban and the Tide staff have put together back-to-back excellent classes, so with the 2022 group, they will be selective. A big-name quarterback will be a priority as well as athletes at the running back position. Tight end has been an interesting position for UA, but a receiving threat to go with Robbie Ouzts from the 2021 class will be needed. On defense, you can never have enough guys that get to the quarterback, so defensive linemen will be highly valued. The safety position will also be a priority on defense.

— By Tim Watts

## 247SPORTS COMPOSITE

| 5★ | 4★ | 3★ | 2★ |
|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | 16 | 3 | 0 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Committments | 27 |
| Average Stars | 4.18 |
| Total Stars | 113 |
| National Rank: 1 | SEC: 1 |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Terrion Arnold** | DB | 6-0 | 180 | ★★★★★ | Tallahassee, FL | John Paul II Catholic |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 25 player and No. 2 safety nationally and No. 6 player in Florida. | | | | | | |
| **Anquin Barnes** | DL | 6-5 | 299 | ★★★★ | Montgomery | Robert E. Lee |
| Ranked No. 29 defensive lineman nationally and No. 15 player in Alabama by 247Sports.com… Had 82 tackles, including 11 tackles for loss, and six quarterback sacks in final two seasons. | | | | | | |
| **Kendrick Blackshire** | LB | 6-2 | 245 | ★★★★ | Duncanville, TX | Duncanville |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 11 inside linebacker nationally and No. 29 player in Texas… As a sophomore, had 111 tackles, including nine tackles for loss, and one quarterback sack. | | | | | | |
| **James Brockermeyer** | OL | 6-3 | 270 | ★★★★ | Ft. Worth, TX | All Saints Episcopal |
| Ranked No. 3 offensive center nationally by 247Sports.com… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game. | | | | | | |
| **Tommy Brockermeyer** | OL | 6-5 | 292 | ★★★★★ | Ft. Worth, TX | All-Saints Episcopal |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 1 offensive center nationally and No. 31 player in Texas… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game. | | | | | | |
| **Jacorey Brooks** | WR | 6-2 | 190 | ★★★★★ | Miami, FL | IMG Academy |
| Ranked No. 26 player and No. 2 wide receiver nationally and No. 8 player in Florida by 247Sports.com… As a junior, had 99 receptions for 1,281 yards and 18 touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Kadarious Calloway** | DB | 6-0 | 200 | ★★★★ | Philadelphia, MS | Philadelphia |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 9 athlete nationally and No. 2 player from Mississippi… Had 67 tackles, 11 interceptions, nine passes broken up, and two fumbles recovered in final two seasons. | | | | | | |
| **Jojo Earle** | WR | 5-10 | 175 | ★★★★ | Aledo, TX | Aledo |
| Ranked No. 77 player and No. 11 wide receiver nationally and No. 11 player in Texas by 247Sports.com… As a junior, had 84 receptions for 1,601 yards and 15 touchdowns… Had 429 yards rushing and 11 touchdowns… Helped team to 15-1 record and second consecutive state championship… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game. | | | | | | |
| **Terrence (TJ) Ferguson** | OL | 6-4 | 290 | ★★★★ | Ft. Valley, GA | Peach County |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 80 player and No. 4 offensive guard nationally… Helped team to state runner-up finish as a junior… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game. | | | | | | |
| **Monkell Goodwine** | DL | 6-4 | 278 | ★★★★ | Upper Marlboro, MD | Rock Creek Christian |
| Ranked No. 9 strongside defensive end nationally by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had 48 tackles and four quarterback sacks in five games… Had 68 tackles, had seven quarterback sacks, 16 quarterback hurries, and three fumbles caused as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Agiye Hall** | WR | 6-3 | 195 | ★★★★ | Valrico, FL | Bloomingdale |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 90 player and No. 12 wideout nationally and No. 14 player from Florida… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game. | | | | | | |
| **Ian Jackson** | LB | 6-1 | 225 | ★★★★ | Prattville | Prattville |
| Ranked No. 14 outside linebacker nationally and No. 8 player from Alabama by 247Sports.com. | | | | | | |
| **Khyree Jackson** | DB | 6-3 | 197 | ★★★ | Clinton, MD | East Mississippi Community College |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 4 junior college player and No. 3 junior college cornerback nationally and No. 2 junior college player in Mississippi. | | | | | | |
| **Tim Keenan, III** | DL | 6-2 | 335 | ★★★ | Birmingham | Ramsay |
| Ranked No. 36 defensive tackle nationally and No. 20 player in Alabama by 247Sports.com. | | | | | | |
| **Keanu Koht** | LB | 6-4 | 215 | ★★★★ | Vero Beach, FL | Vero Beach |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 64 player and No. 5 defensive end nationally and No. 11 player in Florida. | | | | | | |
| **JC Latham** | OL | 6-6 | 325 | ★★★★★ | Oak Creek, WI | IMG Academy |
| Ranked No. 4 player and No. 1 offensive tackle nationally and No. 2 player in Florida by 247Sports.com… Selected to play in the Under Armour All-American Game. | | | | | | |
| **Deontae Lawson** | LB | 6-2 | 217 | ★★★★ | Mobile | Mobile Christian |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 45 player and No. 3 inside linebacker nationally and No. 2 player in Alabama… Had 101 solo tackles and 33 assists as a junior… Helped team to state championship game. | | | | | | |
| **Christian Leary** | WR | 5-10 | 185 | ★★★★ | Orlando, FL | Edgewater |
| Ranked No. 15 wideout nationally and No. 16 player in Florida by 247Sports.com… As a junior, had 1,586 all-purpose yards… Had 520 yards rushing and eight touchdowns… Completed 46 passes for 1,036 yards and eight touchdowns… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game. | | | | | | |
| **Ga'Quincy McKinstrey** | DB | 6-1 | 180 | ★★★★★ | Pinson | Pinson Valley |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 17 player and No. 1 cornerback nationally and No. 1 player in Alabama. | | | | | | |
| **Jalen Milroe** | QB | 6-2 | 201 | ★★★★ | Katy, TX | Tompkins |
| Ranked No. 81 player and No. 4 dual-threat quarterback nationally and No. 13 player in Texas by 247Sports.com. | | | | | | |
| **Robbie Ouzts** | TE | 6-4 | 260 | ★★★ | Rock Hill, SC | Rock Hill |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 34 tight end nationally and No. 7 player in South Carolina… As a senior, had 11 receptions for 154 yards… Had 32 receptions for 465 yards as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Damon Payne, Jr.** | DL | 6-4 | 297 | ★★★★★ | Belleville, MI | Belleville |
| Ranked No. 34 player and No. 3 defensive tackle nationally and No. 2 player in Michigan by 247Sports.com… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game. | | | | | | |
| **Jaeden Roberts** | OL | 6-5 | 340 | ★★★★ | Houston, TX | North Shore |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 15 offensive guard nationally and No. 39 player in Texas. | | | | | | |
| **Davonta Smith** | DB | 6-0 | 185 | ★★★★ | Cincinnati, OH | LaSalle |
| Ranked No. 12 cornerback nationally and No. 6 player in Ohio by 247Sports.com… Had 63 tackles, two interceptions, four passes broken up and one fumble caused as a senior. | | | | | | |
| **Dallas Turner** | LB | 6-4 | 245 | ★★★★★ | Ft. Lauderdale, FL | St. Thomas Aquinas |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 14 player and No. 1 weakside defensive end nationally and No. 2 player in Florida… As a senior, had 36 tackles, including 25 tackles for loss, 13 quarterback sacks, and two passes broken up… Helped team to high school national championship as a junior… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game. | | | | | | |
| **Camar Wheaton** | RB | 5-11 | 190 | ★★★★★ | Garland, TX | Lakeview Centennial |
| Ranked No. 62 player and No. 4 running back nationally and No. 10 player in Texas by 247Sports.com… Had 603 yards rushing and eight touchdowns as a senior… As a junior, had 1,142 yards rushing and 15 touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Kaine Williams** | DB | 6-2 | 195 | ★★★★ | Marrero, LA | John Ehret |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 21 safety nationally and No. 10 player in Louisiana… Had 13 interceptions and seven fumbles caused in four years. | | | | | | |

# PLAYER PROFILE

## Waiting is Over: Robinson's Patience Pays Off

It's been a long wait for Brian Robinson Jr. In four years, he watched other Alabama running backs step into the spotlight and carve their path to glory — Damien Harris, Josh Jacobs, Bo Scarbrough, and finally, Najee Harris.

He's done waiting: It's his time now.

Robinson could have said goodbye to college football after the Crimson Tide's national championship victory over Ohio State. Instead, he took advantage of the extra year of eligibility the NCAA granted athletes.

He's ready to show the college football world and NFL scouts what he can do. He's hoping it will work out for him the same way it worked out for his predecessors. Every starting running back at Alabama under Nick Saban has become an NFL Draft pick, including four first-rounders.

"I felt there are many opportunities for me this year and I'm all in for it," Robinson said.

Robinson carried 91 times for 483 yards and six TDs last season.

"When he did play last year, he played extremely well for us," Saban said. "He just didn't play that much, and it really wasn't his fault."

It was sort of the fault of Najee Harris.

"Najee was one of those kinds of guys that the more he played, the more he ran the ball, the better he got," Saban said. "He's not one of those guys you want to take in and out of the game all the time.

"It says a lot about (Robinson's) maturity and understanding that if he came back, he'd have a more significant role and get to show people what he's capable of and what he can do."

Robinson (1,361 career yards, 5.0-yard avg., 15 TDs) is not guaranteed carries, however. There is a crowded backfield of young talent who want their shot, too.

"We will have to have some guys step up into major roles this year," Robinson said. "I'm excited for our unit and what it can grow into. I am excited to see who can step up into those major roles that we may be missing right now."

RB

**Brian Robinson Jr.**

Photo by Kyle Robertson-USA TODAY Sports

Robinson was referring to the younger players, but he could just as easily have been talking about himself. Being a go-to player is a new feeling, and a role he feels he's ready to thrive in.

"We had great leadership on our team last year," he said. "It's important that I follow up with those leadership qualities."

For more coverage visit lindyssports.com/college-football/sec/alabama

# BEST AND BRIGHTEST

## MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

### QB BRYCE YOUNG

We're doing some projecting here, but there is no doubt the sophomore phenom is the starter. … With that pressure off, Young can focus on taking command of the offense under first-year coordinator Bill O'Brien. … There are incredibly high expectations on him, but he's also got a truckload of talent around him. … Completed 13 of 22 passes last season for 156 yards, one touchdown and no interceptions.

## EMERGING STAR

### LB WILL ANDERSON JR.

True freshmen rarely see action on a Nick Saban defense, much less start. But Anderson did, and flourished in 2020. … He was second on the team with seven sacks, and his speed led to 52 tackles and a spot on the Freshman All-America team. It's no wonder, at 6-4, 235 pounds, he earned the nickname, "The Terminator." … Had seven sacks among his 10.5 for loss.

## TOP NEWCOMER

### LB HENRY TO'O TO'O

Those who think the new transfer rules will result in the rich just getting richer can use this May arrival as a strong indicator. Assuming the SEC follows the lead of several conferences that have dismantled their in-conference transfer restrictions, the team's deepest position will become even more deep and a further audacious collection of talent.

# AT RISK FOR

In case of medical emergency, call 911 or go directly to your local ER

## A concussion

is an injury caused by a blow to the head in which the brain moves rapidly and may collide with the inside of the skull. Even a minor fall or collision may be of concern, so be alert to symptoms such as headaches, unsteadiness, confusion or other types of abnormal behavior. Any athlete with a suspected concussion:

- Should be IMMEDIATELY REMOVED FROM PLAY/ACTIVITY
- Should be evaluated right away by a doctor/healthcare professional
- Should not be left alone
- Should not drive a motor vehicle

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205.638.4800

For a Concussion Clinic appointment,
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www.ChildrensAL.org/concussion

# ARKANSAS RAZORBACKS

For more coverage of the Razorbacks, visit arkansas.247Sports.com

**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Kendal Briles **DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Barry Odom **STADIUM:** Reynolds Razorback Stadium: 72,000

## ARKANSAS SEEKING TO BUILD OFF 2020 MOMENTUM

Returning 19 starters bodes well for Arkansas.

Returning 19 from a team that won three SEC games — instead of none — bodes better.

Sam Pittman, Arkansas' offensive line coach when Bret Bielema's 2014 and 2015 Razorbacks improved to 7-6 overall and then 8-5 after a 3-9 debut, did well in his first season as head coach by directing the team to a 3-7 record against all-SEC competition.

Consider that the preceding Chad Morris regime staggered to 0-8 and 0-8 in SEC play in the previous two seasons.

Fan morale had sunk so low that you could hear mutterings that Arkansas perhaps should abandon the SEC and seek an easier league.

Pittman, growing up in nearby Oklahoma and following the Hogs during their glory days under Frank Broyles and Lou Holtz, scoffed. He knew Arkansas and, having coached offensive lines at Tennessee, Arkansas and Georgia, knew the SEC.

"I think we have to continue to improve and all that," Pittman said. "But I've certainly never one day thought we didn't belong in the SEC and in the SEC West. It's a challenging, challenging deal but at the same time we're Arkansas. We should be right there each and every week."

Other than the closing 52-3 loss against eventual national champion Alabama, the Hogs were at least competitive. They won three times, starting with the Game 2 upset of Mississippi State.

Pittman's Hogs realized they belonged.

"At some point when you come into a new program you have to have some kind of validation that what you're preaching is the truth, that how you go about your daily business will end up with positive results," Pittman said.

"Winning the second game of the year validated to the kids, I hope, that if they trust the process that we can turn the program around together."

That should carry over with so many returning.

"We improved in every area and we certainly should have," Pittman said. "We've got 19 starters back. I was pleased with the way they practice with a business-like approach each and every day. There's a lot to be said for that."

That said, Pittman said the Hogs faced a pivotal summer.

"The No. 1 concern I have is our conditioning," Pittman said. "We have to get bigger and we have to get in ultimate shape. That's hard to do when you are trying to get your team, big, big, big and yet do it at the same pace you did at a lighter weight."

## OFFENSE

KJ Jefferson, the 2020 backup quarterback, surged late in spring ball, accelerating to the role of starting quarterback in 2021. The third-year sophomore was the 2020 backup to Feleipe Franks, who signed as an undrafted free agent with the Atlanta Falcons.

"I was very vocal that I didn't think our accuracy was very good," Pittman said of the early spring practices. "But I felt when we came back from the break the last eight practices were much better with accuracy.

"Especially after the spring game, I felt we know exactly what we have at quarterback."

Jefferson made one start late in the year as an injury replacement. He completed 20 of 41 passes for 295 yards and three touchdowns, adding a rushing touchdown, in a 50-48 loss at Missouri. If that is Jefferson's true form, the Hogs will be fine.

Freshmen Malik Hornsby, who redshirted last season, and Lucas Coley are still-developing dual-threat quarterbacks.

Trelon Smith isn't a big running back, but he assumed a big burden as Arkansas' leading rusher last season with 710 yards. Another scatback, senior T.J. Hammonds, is No. 2, while bigger backs — such as Dominique Johnson and 220-pound freshman "Rocket" Sanders — will also look to make an impact. Sanders was recruited as a receiver.

And there is incoming four-star freshman running back AJ Green, who has the frame to develop into a 200-pounder and keep his speed, Pittman said.

"We've got to find a big back," Pittman said. "If it's nothing more than third-and-

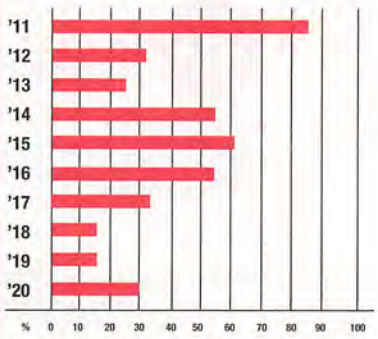
## SCHEDULE

| Date | Opponent | '20 Record |
|---|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | RICE | 2-3 |
| Sept. 11 | TEXAS | 7-3 |
| Sept. 18 | GEORGIA SOUTHERN | 8-5 |
| Sept. 25 | vs. Texas A&M (Arlington, TX) | 9-1 |
| Oct. 2 | at Georgia | 8-2 |
| Oct. 9 | at Ole Miss | 5-5 |
| Oct. 16 | AUBURN | 6-5 |
| Oct. 23 | vs. UAPB (Little Rock, AK) | 4-1 |
| Nov. 6 | MISSISSIPPI STATE | 4-7 |
| Nov. 13 | at LSU | 5-5 |
| Nov. 20 | at Alabama | 13-0 |
| Nov. 26 | MISSOURI | 5-5 |

## RESULTS

| 3-7, 3-7 | | |
|---|---|---|
| L | GEORGIA | 10-37 |
| W | at Mississippi State | 21-14 |
| L | at Auburn | 28-30 |
| W | OLE MISS | 33-21 |
| L | at Texas A&M | 31-42 |
| W | TENNESSEE | 24-13 |
| L | at Florida | 35-63 |
| L | LSU | 24-27 |
| L | at Missouri | 48-50 |
| L | ALABAMA | 3-52 |

## 10-YEAR WINNING TREND



## AT A GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Fayetteville, Ark.

**2020:** 3-7 overall, 3-7 SEC (T-6th, West)

**COACH:** Sam Pittman — At Arkansas and overall: 3-7, 1 year

**RETURNING STARTERS:** 19; 9 offense, 9 defense, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:**
QB KJ Jefferson, WR Treylon Burks, C Ricky Stromberg, LB Grant Morgan, LB Bumper Pool, S Jalen Catalon

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:**
Officially beating three SEC teams and unofficially beating another (Auburn) only to be deprived by an acknowledged officiating error instills confidence in the Pittman regime after his immediate two coaching predecessors from 2017-2019 floundered at 1-23 in the SEC.

**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:**
There's a new starting QB, and the offense lost its second-best receiver to the transfer portal. The Hogs must generate a better pass rush and have a more physical running game while competing in nation's toughest conference.

**KEY LOSSES:**
QB Feleipe Franks, WR Mike Woods, DT Jonathan Marshall

**OVERVIEW:**
Arkansas posted some eye-opening victories early last season — Mississippi State on the road, Ole Miss, Tennessee — before finishing on a four-game skid. But coming within three points of LSU and two at Missouri further boosted confidence in Pittman and that the Razorbacks are climbing back to relevancy.

**KEY NUMBER:**
**9** The number of seasons Arkansas has gone without finishing in the AP Top 25. The Razorbacks finished fifth in 2011 under coach Bret Bielema.

**WR Treylon BURKS**

Photo by AP Photo/Michael Woods

DB

**Jalen Catalon**

Photo by AP Photo/Michael Woods

## SCOUTING REPORT: Offense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | KJ Jefferson | So. | Key question: Can he build on lone 2020 start? | Malik Hornsby, Fr. |
| RB | **Trelon Smith*** | Jr. | Arizona State transfer had 172 yards vs. Mizzou. | T.J Hammonds, Sr. |
| WR | **Treylon Burks*** | Jr. | Among the nation's best and likely first-rounder. | Jaquayln Crawford, Jr. |
| WR | Trey Knox | Jr. | Tall option; essential he re-emerges to 2019 form. | Tyson Morris, Sr. |
| WR | **De'Vion Warren*** | Sr. | Razorbacks need him healthy. | John David White, So. |
| TE | **Blake Kern*** | Sr. | A valuable old hand; made 20 catches last season. | Hudson Henry, So. |
| LT | **Myron Cunningham*** | Sr. | A big plus he returned to help team, draft stock. | Marcus Henderson, Fr. |
| LG | Luke Jones | Jr. | Jones slightly leading incumbent after the spring. | **Brady Latham, So.*** |
| C | **Ricky Stromberg*** | Jr. | Former four-star has been a solid center for Hogs. | Shane Clenin, Sr. |
| RG | **Ty Clary*** | Sr. | Another valuable old hand and potential draft pick. | Beaux Limmer, So. |
| RT | **Dalton Wagner*** | Sr. | Through three head coaches, just keeps battling. | Ty'Kieast Crawford, So. |
| PK | Matthew Phillips | Jr. | This will be a wide-open job in the fall. | Cam Little, Fr. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

## SCOUTING REPORT: Defense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | Jashaud Stewart | So. | Was a pleasant spring surprise. | Dorian Gerald, Sr. |
| DT | **Isaiah Nichols*** | Jr. | Started seven games last season and tallied 24 tackles. | Taurean Carter, So. |
| DE | **Eric Gregory*** | So. | Also could play defensive tackle. | Zach Williams, Jr. |
| LB | **Grant Morgan*** | Sr. | First-team All-SEC LB (111 tackles, 7.5 TFLs). | Hayden Henry, Sr. |
| LB | **Bumper Pool*** | Sr. | High volume tackler (101 last season). | Hayden Henry, Sr. |
| NB | **Greg Brooks Jr.*** | Jr. | Another extremely experienced defender for Hogs. | Khari Johnson, So. |
| CB | **Montaric Brown*** | Sr. | Broke up six passes and picked one last season. | Trent Gordon, Jr. |
| CB | **Hudson Clark*** | So. | In an up-for-grabs battle once fall camp arrives. | LaDarrius Bishop, Jr. |
| S | **Jalen Catalon*** | So. | Adorns all the "All" teams; could be a pro in 2022. | Myles Slusher, So. |
| S | Simeon Blair | Jr. | Former walk-on earns a starting nod. | Malik Chavis, So. |
| S | **Joe Foucha*** | Sr. | Has probably seen it all; 158 tackles in 31 games. | Jayden Johnson, Fr. |
| P | **Reid Bauer*** | Jr. | Job open; Bauer had 43.5-yard avg on 39 punts. | Sam Loy, Sr. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

short, we need a bigger back."

The passing game absorbed a post-spring gut punch when second-leading receiver Mike Woods (32 catches for 619 yards and five TDs last season) transferred to Oklahoma. But key players return to support All-SEC wideout Treylon Burks, who caught 51 passes for 820 yards and seven touchdowns in 2020.

"I am very confident and comfortable with the wide receiver spot," Pittman said.

Pittman touted former walk-on John David White, the leading receiver in the spring game with five catches for 87 yards and a touchdown, and returning sixth-year seniors Tyson Morris and De'Vion Warren.

Warren missed the last three games of 2020 and spring ball because of knee surgery but was "ahead of schedule" according to Pittman and is expected to be healthy come August.

The top two tight ends — sixth-year senior Blake Kern and third-year sophomore Hudson Henry — return.

A line that returns five players with starting experience will be bigger and better, Pittman vows — and Luke Jones closed spring ahead of returning starter Brady Latham at left guard.

"I'm pleased with the progression of that group," Pittman said.

## DEFENSE

The defense sports star power. Grant Morgan, the SEC's second-leading tackler (111), earned first-team All-SEC honors, while safety Jalen Catalon and weakside linebacker Bumper Pool took home second-team recognition.

Pool recorded 101 tackles last fall, and depth is good as versatile top reserve Hayden Henry, a senior, was pressing him for playing time this spring.

Catalon leads an experienced secondary that returns starting corners Montaric Brown and Hudson Clark, nickel Greg Brooks, safety Joe Foucha and rising former walk-on Simeon Blair. Cornerback LaDarrius Bishop closed spring drills running even with Clark.

Letterman safeties Jayden Johnson, Myles Slusher, Malik Chavis and Nathan Parodi bucked for playing time as alternates. Penn State graduate transfer Trent Gordon fit in well competing at corner.

"I love our secondary," Pittman said. "They are getting better."

They must sufficiently improve, Pittman said, in order for Arkansas to play more man coverage than it did last season.

"I think our players certainly are confident they can do it," Pittman said. "We've got to be able to mix it up more than we did last year. So that was a big move in the spring to get that done."

Returning sixth-year seniors Morgan and Henry, along with Pool not only makes Arkansas' linebacking better at the outset, but buys time for developing freshman linebackers Chris Paul, Jackson Woodard and Kelin Burrle.

Paul, an early enrolled true freshman, especially stood out during the spring scrimmages.

The defensive line must replace sixth-round draft pick Jonathan Marshall in

## TOP 5 NFL PROSPECTS

**1. Myron Cunningham OT 6-6 330 5.22 Sr.**

A traditional throwback mauler who moves well and is athletic, Cunningham possesses the size to play at either offensive tackle position. He utilizes his hands well but can be a bit sloppy at times, relying on bulk and strength to win battles, rather than leverage. He also tends to play a bit high with some hip tightness. But when he gets his hands inside, he can be difficult to break down due to all of his upper-body strength.

While he tends to struggle at times with speed rushers, Cunningham does make up for his lack of mobility with his power and strength, often times knocking edge rushers off their mark. In 2019 as a junior, he allowed just one sack on 383 pass block plays, which caught the attention of NFL scouts. A solid final season in Fayetteville could see him and WR Treylon Burks battling to be the first Razorback off the draft board.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2. Treylon Burks** | **WR** | **6-3** | **225** | **4.58** | **Jr.** |
| **3. Grant Morgan** | **ILB** | **5-11** | **230** | **4.80** | **Sr.** |
| **4. Bumper Pool** | **ILB** | **6-2** | **230** | **4.69** | **Sr.** |
| **5. Jalen Catalon** | **CB** | **5-10** | **198** | **4.49** | **So.** |

— Ric Serritella, NFL Draft Bible

**Bumper Pool**
Photo by Brett Rojo-USA TODAY Sports

the middle and generate a pass rush that Pittman and defensive coordinator Barry Odom said lacked on the edges.

"We feel like we're headed in the right direction but not there yet," Pittman said. "To be that multiple front that Barry wants and I want we need different kids to step up."

Odom, Missouri's head coach from 2016-2019, added two of his former Tigers via the transfer portal after the spring — defensive end Tre Williams of Columbia, Mo., and defensive tackle Markell Utsey, an Arkansas native. Arkansas also added defensive tackle John Ridgeway via Illinois State.

Isaiah Nichols, Taurean Carter, Eric Gregory, Dorian Gerald, Zach Williams and Mataio Soli return.

Jashaud Stewart, who lettering as a freshman reserve last season, surprised by ending spring drills with the first team.

If the D-line as a whole improves, Odom will have the depth to intersperse more four-man fronts.

"We have to get to the point where our four D-linemen are as good as our nickel and our safety," Pittman said. "If we do that, then we can be very, very multiple."

## SPECIAL TEAMS

The considerable spring practice time spent on special teams underscores the dissatisfaction of Pittman and coordinator Scott Fountain with special teams last fall.

"A lot of work on that area," Pittman said.

And a lot of work still to be done.

"We have not declared a punt returner and I think that's probably the biggest question mark that we have on special teams," Pittman said. "Your special teams usually get better when you find a returner that's really dynamic on kickoff or punts or both, and then your roster gets a little bit bigger and a little more physical and you can block for the guy."

Pittman noted late-spring progress by punter Sam Loy (five attempts for a 35.2-yard average last season) and early-enrolled freshman kicker Cameron Little.

## SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

Arkansas opens with three non-conference games in Fayetteville, starting with old Southwest Conference rivals Rice of Conference USA and Texas of the Big 12. Next up is the Sun Belt's Georgia Southern. The Eagles went 8-5 last season and closed 2020 by routing Louisiana Tech, 38-3.

The closest thing to a gimme on the Razorbacks' schedule is Arkansas-Pine Bluff of the FCS, which went 4-1 in its spring schedule and won the SWAC Western Division title.

Mostly, though, it's brutal business as usual. Arkansas has to play SEC East power Georgia in Athens, with its other crossover game being Missouri in Fayetteville. In the SEC West, the Hogs play Alabama, LSU and Ole Miss on the road, Texas A&M at a neutral site (Arlington, Texas) and get Auburn and Mississippi State at home.

— Nate Allen

### 2018 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 21.7 | T-113 |
| Rushing | 143.4 | 98 |
| Passing | 192.3 | T-97 |
| Total | 335.7 | 117 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 34.8 | 108 |
| Rushing | 167.8 | 70 |
| Passing | 245.3 | 87 |
| Total | 413.2 | 79 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| -10 | -0.83 | T-119 |

### 2019 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 21.4 | 110 |
| Rushing | 147.2 | 85 |
| Passing | 192.9 | 103 |
| Total | 340.1 | 111 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 36.8 | 124 |
| Rushing | 221.5 | 122 |
| Passing | 229.2 | 69 |
| Total | 450.7 | 110 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 5 | - 0.42 | T-97 |

### 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 25.7 | 86 |
| Rushing | 151.3 | 78 |
| Passing | 240.2 | 52 |
| Total | 391.5 | 66 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 34.9 | 98 |
| Rushing | 192.1 | 92 |
| Passing | 259.6 | 102 |
| Total | 451.7 | 106 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 5 | + 0.50 | T-30 |

# NOTEBOOK

**Sam Pittman** enjoyed closing spring drills by easily answering a "tough" question about his Razorbacks.

"We don't have guys fall down on the ground and they stay down there for five or six hours," the second-year coach said of the Razorbacks' increasing toughness.

"They're getting back up and they're coming back and playing. There were times here we've had a lot of people on the sidelines that you question their toughness. We don't have that anymore and I'm very proud of that."

• Toughness obviously improves a team over the long run but Pittman is also accounting on improvement in that area in the short run — as in third-and-short.

The power game in those situations is something Pittman constantly emphasizes.

"I think we've made nice strides in the run game," Pittman said.

"Part of that is our backs are playing better. Our line is much bigger, understands our offense much better. So we have made some physical strides in the running game. A lot of that has to do with the wide receivers blocking as well."

Mobile quarterbacks **KJ Jefferson** and **Malik Hornsby** should help, too.

• Coaches inevitably talk about senior leaders, but Pittman talks about a sophomore leading seniors.

**Jashaud Stewart**, a relatively unheralded three-star recruit from Jonesboro, Ark., went mostly unnoticed last fall as a 6-2, 223-pound freshman defensive lineman playing special teams.

He closed spring drills running ahead of his elders as a first-team 240-pound defensive end.

"I don't believe you have to be a senior to lead," Pittman said. "I think you've got to beat somebody out then you become a leader, and that's what he's done. He plays with a tremendous amount of energy. Whatever he's got in there, that's what you're going to get every snap."

• Another young, relatively unheralded D-lineman, third-year sophomore letterman nose tackle **Taurean Carter**, caught center **Ricky Stromberg**'s attention for their scrimmage matchups.

"Sometimes I shoot my hands and he grabs them," Stromberg said. "Not a lot of D-lineman I have played have been able to do that. He uses his hands really well and that is a big thing for a defensive linemen."

# RAZORBACKS SPRING ROSTER

| Quarterback | | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | Lucas Coley | QB | 6-2 | 215 | Fr. | San Antonio, TX |
| 4 | Malik Hornsby | QB | 6-2 | 190 | Fr. | Missouri City, TX |
| 1 | KJ Jefferson | Q3 | 6-3 | 240 | So. | Sardis, MS |
| 9 | John Stephen Jones | QB | 5-11 | 204 | Jr. | Dallas, TX |
| 18 | Kade Renfro | QB | 6-3 | 208 | Fr. | Stephenville, TX |
| **Running Back** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 26 | Donte Buckner | RB | 5-11 | 200 | Fr. | Pine Bluff |
| 31 | Preston Crawford | RB | 6-0 | 205 | Fr. | Bentonville |
| 41 | T.J. Hammonds | RB | 5-10 | 190 | Sr. | Little Rock |
| 21 | Javion Hunt | RB | 6-0 | 205 | Fr. | Oklahoma City, OK |
| 20 | Dominique Johnson | RB | 6-1 | 240 | Fr. | Crowley, TX |
| 23 | Josh Oglesby | RB | 5-8 | 175 | Jr. | Katy, TX |
| 5 | Raheim Sanders | RB | 6-2 | 220 | Fr. | Rockledge, FL |
| 22 | Trelon Smith | RB | 5-9 | 190 | Jr. | Houston, TX |
| 32 | Reid Turner | RB | 5-10 | 185 | So. | Farmington |
| **Wide Receivers** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 16 | Treylon Burks | WR | 6-3 | 225 | Jr. | Warren |
| 84 | Beau Cason | WR | 6-4 | 200 | Fr. | Springdale |
| 6 | Kendall Catalon | WR | 5-9 | 185 | Sr. | Mansfield, TX |
| 85 | Harper Cole | WR | 5-9 | 175 | Fr. | Aurora, IL |
| 11 | Jaquayln Crawford | WR | 5-10 | 175 | Jr. | Rockdale, TX |
| 33 | Karch Gardiner | WR | 5-9 | 180 | So. | El Paso, TX |
| 83 | Chris Harris | WR | 5-10 | 186 | Fr. | Dumas |
| 2 | Ketron Jackson Jr. | WR | 6-2 | 205 | Fr. | Royse City, TX |
| 7 | Trey Knox | WR | 6-5 | 209 | Jr. | Murfreesboro, TN |
| 19 | Tyson Morris | WR | 6-1 | 196 | Sr. | Helena-West Helena |
| 81 | Darin Turner | WR | 6-3 | 206 | Fr. | Memphis, TN |
| 10 | De'Vion Warren | WR | 5-10 | 185 | Sr. | Monroe, LA |
| 17 | John David White | WR | 5-11 | 180 | So. | Little Rock |
| 13 | Jaedon Wilson | WR | 6-3 | 175 | Fr. | DeSoto, TX |
| 8 | Mike Woods | WR | 6-1 | 198 | Sr. | Magnolia, TX |
| **Tight Ends** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 46 | Nathan Bax | TE | 6-4 | 255 | So. | Jefferson City, MO |
| 82 | Hudson Henry | TE | 6-5 | 255 | So. | Little Rock |
| 88 | Koilan Jackson | TE | 6-2 | 220 | Sr. | Little Rock |
| 39 | Nathan Johnson | TE | 6-4 | 205 | Fr. | Little Rock |
| 87 | Blake Kern | TE | 6-4 | 255 | Sr. | Lamar |
| 42 | Zach Lee | TE | 6-5 | 220 | Fr. | Bentonville |
| 80 | Collin Sutherland | TE | 6-5 | 225 | Fr. | Flower Mound, TX |
| **Offensive Lineman** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 66 | Ty Clary | OL | 6-4 | 315 | Sr. | Fayetteville |
| 57 | Shane Clenin | OL | 6-6 | 320 | Sr. | Festus, MO |
| 53 | Ty'Kieast Crawford | OL | 6-5 | 355 | So. | Carthage, TX |
| 76 | Myron Cunningham | OL | 6-6 | 330 | Sr. | Warren, OH |
| 75 | Ray Curry Jr. | OL | 6-5 | 300 | Fr. | Memphis, TN |
| 64 | Logan Fahrlander | OL | 6-3 | 285 | Fr. | Republic, MO |
| 56 | Marcus Henderson | OL | 6-5 | 295 | Fr. | Memphis, TN |
| 70 | Luke Jones | OL | 6-5 | 310 | Jr. | Little Rock |
| 62 | Brady Latham | OL | 6-5 | 300 | So. | Jenks, OK |
| 55 | Beaux Limmer | OL | 6-5 | 300 | So. | Tyler, TX |
| 54 | Austin Nix | OL | 6-2 | 310 | Jr. | Texarkana |
| 53 | John Oehrlein | OL | 6-1 | 239 | So. | Austin, TX |
| 79 | Dylan Rathcke | OL | 6-5 | 310 | So. | Baton Rouge, LA |
| 67 | Payton Simpson | OL | 6-4 | 310 | Fr. | Bentonville |
| 74 | Jalen St. John | OL | 6-5 | 340 | Fr. | St. Louis, MO |
| 51 | Ricky Stromberg | OL | 6-4 | 316 | Jr. | Tulsa, OK |
| 72 | Drew Vest | OL | 6-6 | 310 | So. | Searcy |
| 78 | Dalton Wagner | OL | 6-9 | 325 | Sr. | Spring Grove, IL |
| 71 | Ryan Winkel | OL | 6-6 | 305 | Jr. | Memphis, TN |
| **Defensive Lineman** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 44 | Andy Boykin | DL | 6-4 | 304 | Fr. | Lagrange, GA |
| 91 | Taurean Carter | DL | 6-3 | 300 | So. | Mansfield, TX |
| 48 | Nicholas Fulwider | DL | 6-7 | 290 | Jr. | Tyrone, GA |
| 5 | Dorian Gerald | DL | 6-3 | 255 | Sr. | Florence, SC |
| 50 | Eric Gregory | DL | 6-4 | 298 | So. | Memphis, TN |
| 95 | Morgan Hanna | DL | 6-4 | 242 | So. | Greenwood |
| 59 | Griffin Hunt | DL | 6-4 | 245 | Jr. | Lucas, TX |
| 99 | Enoch Jackson Jr. | DL | 6-0 | 298 | So. | Mansfield, TX |
| 90 | Marcus Miller | DL | 6-5 | 315 | So. | Warren |
| 93 | Isaiah Nichols | DL | 6-3 | 290 | Jr. | Springdale |
| 11 | Mataio Soli | DL | 6-4 | 240 | Jr. | Douglasville, GA |
| 58 | Jashaud Stewart | DL | 6-2 | 240 | So. | Jonesboro |
| 37 | Eric Thomas Jr. | DL | 6-3 | 260 | So. | Pensacola, FL |
| 97 | Jalen Williams | DL | 6-3 | 305 | Jr. | Tylertown, MS |
| 56 | Zach Williams | DL | 6-4 | 255 | Jr. | Little Rock |
| **Linebackers** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 25 | Marco Avant | LB | 6-3 | 208 | Fr. | Forrest City |
| 43 | Brooks Both | LB | 6-0 | 235 | Fr. | Harrison |
| 33 | Kelin Burrle | LB | 6-0 | 208 | Fr. | Harvey, LA |
| 30 | Levi Draper | LB | 6-1 | 250 | Sr. | Collinsville, OK |
| 22 | Deon Edwards | LB | 6-1 | 220 | Sr. | Clermont, FL |
| 47 | Caleb Fields | LB | 6-0 | 219 | Fr. | Fayetteville |
| 27 | Hayden Henry | LB | 6-2 | 225 | Sr. | Little Rock |
| 51 | Chandler McIntosh | LB | 6-1 | 234 | Fr. | Little Rock |
| 31 | Grant Morgan | LB | 5-11 | 230 | Sr. | Greenwood |
| 28 | Andrew Parker | LB | 6-2 | 245 | Jr. | New Orleans, LA |
| 40 | Chris Paul Jr. | LB | 6-1 | 240 | Fr. | Cordele, GA |
| 10 | Bumper Pool | LB | 6-2 | 230 | Sr. | Lucas, TX |
| 34 | J.T. Towers | LB | 6-4 | 220 | Fr. | Little Rock |
| 49 | McKinley Williams | LB | 6-1 | 215 | Jr. | Sheridan |
| 45 | Jackson Woodard | LB | 6-3 | 235 | Fr. | Little Rock |
| 44 | Jake Yurachek | LB | 6-0 | 235 | Jr. | Friendswood, TX |
| 20 | Zach Zimos | LB | 6-4 | 235 | So. | Sugar Land, TX |
| **Defensive Backs** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 24 | LaDarrius Bishop | DB | 6-0 | 196 | Jr. | Ashdown |
| 15 | Simeon Blair | DB | 5-10 | 207 | Jr. | Pine Bluff |
| 9 | Greg Brooks Jr. | DB | 5-11 | 188 | Jr. | Harvey, LA |
| 21 | Montaric Brown | DB | 6-0 | 195 | Sr. | Ashdown |
| 23 | Devin Bush | DB | 6-0 | 199 | So. | New Orleans, LA |
| 1 | Jalen Catalon | DB | 5-10 | 198 | So. | Mansfield, TX |
| 4 | Malik Chavis | DB | 6-2 | 198 | So. | Rison |
| 17 | Hudson Clark | DB | 6-2 | 180 | So. | Dallas, TX |
| 26 | Kevin Compton | DB | 6-2 | 172 | Fr. | Pine Bluff |
| 38 | Jon Conley | DB | 6-0 | 170 | So. | Fayetteville |
| 7 | Joe Foucha | DB | 5-11 | 206 | Sr. | New Orleans, LA |
| 18 | Trent Gordon | DB | 5-11 | 195 | Jr. | Spring, TX |
| 36 | Jermaine Hamilton-Jordan | DB | 6-1 | 209 | Fr. | Kansas City, MO |
| 8 | Jayden Johnson | DB | 6-2 | 215 | Fr. | Cedartown, GA |
| 19 | Khari Johnson | DB | 6-0 | 193 | So. | Boston, MA |
| 14 | Nathan Parodi | DB | 5-9 | 170 | Jr. | Austin, TX |
| 29 | Cade Pearson | DB | 6-3 | 212 | Jr. | Texarkana, TX |
| 2 | Myles Slusher | DB | 6-0 | 196 | So. | Broken Arrow, OK |
| 6 | Jacorrei Turner | DB | 6-2 | 197 | Fr. | Atlanta, GA |
| 3 | Nick Turner | DB | 5-11 | 190 | Fr. | New Orleans, LA |
| 41 | Darrell Wilson | DB | 6-3 | 205 | Sr. | Warrenville, IL |
| **Specialist** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 30 | Reid Bauer | P | 5-11 | 204 | Jr. | Magnolia, TX |
| 90 | Vito Calvaruso | K | 6-2 | 191 | So. | Jefferson City, MO |
| 40 | George Caratan | P | 6-2 | 216 | Sr. | Pacific Palisades, CA |
| 53 | Eli Chism | LS | 6-2 | 226 | Fr. | Shreveport, LA |
| 29 | Cameron Little | K/P | 6-2 | 188 | Fr. | Moore, OK |
| 43 | Sam Loy | P | 6-1 | 188 | Sr. | San Clemente, CA |
| 80 | Matthew Phillips | K/P | 5-10 | 173 | Jr. | Brentwood, TN |
| 48 | Jordan Silver | LS | 6-1 | 243 | Sr. | Branson, MO |

# OPPOSING COACHES VIEW

• "I think it could be argued Sam Pittman did as good a job coaching a first-year team as anyone in recent SEC history because they were not very good before Sam got there. They hadn't won an SEC game in two years and won just one in three years. Sam is team-builder type guy. He's a quality human being. Players play hard for him. He can recruit. He's one of the few authentic, personable and believable head coaches in the SEC. He cares about his players. …

• "(Defensive coordinator) Barry Odom did a really good job with the talent he had. He had only one draftable player. His defense played more physical and with better effort. …

• "They won (three games) with Feleipe Franks, who's like a schizophrenic quarterback who can play really well, then get you beat. If they get a quarterback, look out."

# INDIVIDUAL STATS

## PASSING

| NAME | GP | Effic | Cmp | Att | Int | Pct | Yards | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| F. Franks | 9 | 163.1 | 163 | 238 | 4 | 68.5 | 2107 | 17 | 82 | 234.1 |
| KJ Jefferson | 5 | 133.4 | 20 | 41 | 0 | 48.8 | 295 | 3 | 68 | 59.0 |

## RECEIVING

| RECEIVING | GP | No. | Yards | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| T. Burks | 9 | 51 | 820 | 16.1 | 7 | 68 | 91.1 |
| M. Woods | 10 | 32 | 619 | 19.3 | 5 | 82 | 61.9 |
| T. Smith | 10 | 22 | 159 | 7.2 | 1 | 25 | 15.9 |

## RUSHING

| RUSHING | GP | Att. | Gain | Loss | Net | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| T. Smith | 10 | 134 | 727 | 17 | 710 | 5.3 | 5 | 83 | 71.0 |
| R. Boyd | 7 | 82 | 325 | 16 | 309 | 3.8 | 3 | 16 | 44.1 |
| F. Franks | 9 | 105 | 387 | 183 | 204 | 1.9 | 1 | 28 | 22.7 |

## DEF. LEADERS

Tackles: G. Morgan 111, B. Pool 101, J. Catalon 99
Tackles for loss: G. Morgan 7.5, B. Pool 6.5, J. Marshall 6.5
Sacks: E. Gregory 2.5, G. Morgan 2, J. Coates 2
Interceptions: J. Catalon 3, H. Clark 3, J. Foucha 2, G. Brooks Jr. 2

# 247SPORTS RAZORBACKS RECRUITING 2021

## 3 NEWCOMERS OF IMPACT

### AJ GREEN

Arkansas made it a point to recruit more speed in the Class of 2021, and that's exactly what the Hogs are getting in this home run threat from Tulsa, Okla. Green, who had a staggering offer list, wasn't in for spring but has the ability to make immediate contributions in Fayetteville.

### KETRON JACKSON

This 6-foot-2, 205-pound receiver from Royse City, Texas, chose the Razorbacks over Alabama, LSU, TCU, Texas, Texas A&M, and many others. Arkansas returns an experienced group of wide receivers, but if Jackson's early enrollment pays off, he'll have a spot in the rotation sooner rather than later.

### RAHEIM SANDERS

Sanders might be Arkansas' most versatile addition in the 2021 class. The 6-2, 220-pounder from Rockledge, Fla. played wide receiver in high school but made the move to running back this spring. Sanders might be the big back that Arkansas is searching for in an otherwise smaller backfield.

## SLEEPER

### JAYDEN JOHNSON

Johnson is a former South Carolina commitment who fell into the Hogs' lap after the Gamecocks fired Will Muschamp. After enrolling in January, the 6-2, 215-pound Georgia native showed plenty of flashes during spring drills. Don't be surprised if he cracks the depth chart this fall.

## 2022 NEEDS

Sam Pittman's name is synonymous with big-time offensive line recruits, and the Head Hog is looking for a major haul in 2022. The Razorbacks already have a four-star addition in Andrew Chamblee and are still in the hunt for others. Linebacker is another huge area of need in this class. Look for the Hogs to make a stronger presence in the state of Georgia, a state in which they've already offered more than three dozen prospects.

— By Danny West

## 247SPORTS COMPOSITE

| 5★ | 4★ | 3★ | 2★ |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 4 | 19 | 0 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Commitments | 23 |
| Average Stars | 3.17 |
| Total Stars | 73 |
| National Rank: 25 | SEC: 9 |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Marco Avant** | LB | 6-3 | 208 | ★★★ | Forrest City | Jonesboro |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 46 outside linebacker nationally and No. 4 player in Arkansas… As a senior, had 91 tackles, three quarterback sacks and one fumble caused… Had 83 tackles, including 12 tackles for loss, as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Cameron Ball** | DL | 6-5 | 303 | ★★★ | Atlanta, GA | Tri-Cities |
| Ranked No. 29 player in Georgia by 247Sports.com… Had 42 tackles, including six tackles for loss, four quarterback sacks, three passes broken up, one fumble caused and two fumbles recovered as a senior… As a junior, had 30 tackles, including three tackles for loss, two quarterback sacks, two fumbles caused and one fumble recovered. | | | | | | |
| **Cole Carson** | OL | 6-5 | 290 | ★★★ | Bogata, TX | Rivercrest |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 77 player in Texas… Played offensive and defensive tackle… As a senior, helped team to second round of playoffs. | | | | | | |
| **Lucas Coley** | QB | 6-2 | 215 | ★★★ | San Antonio, TX | Cornerstone Christian School |
| Had more than 1,100 yards passing and 13 touchdowns with one interception as a senior… Had almost 500 yards rushing and 11 touchdowns… As a junior, had more than 3,000 yards total offense and 30 touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Trent Gordon** | DB | 5-11 | 199 | ★★★ | Spring, TX | Penn State |
| Played three years at Penn State (2018-20)… Had 21 tackles (13 solo) and five passes broken up… Ranked No. 56 cornerback nationally and No. 80 player in Texas out of high school by 247Sports.com. | | | | | | |
| **AJ Green** | RB | 5-11 | 194 | ★★★★ | Tulsa, OK | Union |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 2 player in Oklahoma… As a senior, had 1,325 yards rushing and 19 touchdowns… Had 939 yards rushing and nine touchdowns as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Jermaine Hamilton-Jordan** | DB | 6-1 | 209 | ★★★ | Kansas City, MO | Lincoln College Prep |
| Had 91 tackles, including 17 tackles for loss, one fumble recovered, and two interceptions, returning one for touchdown, as a senior… Had 441 yards rushing and seven touchdowns, averaging 12.6 yards per reception… As a junior, had 150 tackles, including 18 tackles for loss, five quarterback sacks, one interception and one fumble caused. | | | | | | |
| **Javion Hunt** | RB | 6-0 | 205 | ★★★ | Oklahoma City, OK | Carl Albert |
| Ranked No. 23 running back nationally and No. 7 player in Oklahoma by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had 771 yards rushing and 12 touchdowns… Had 1,114 yards rushing and 25 touchdowns as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Ketron Jackson** | WR | 6-2 | 205 | ★★★★ | Royse City, TX | Royse City |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 21 wide receiver nationally and No. 21 player in Texas… Had 39 receptions for 765 yards and 10 touchdowns as a senior, averaging 19.6 yards per reception. | | | | | | |
| **Jayden Johnson** | DB | 6-2 | 215 | ★★★ | Cedartown, GA | Cedartown |
| Ranked No. 26 player in Georgia by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had 347 yards rushing and five touchdowns… Had 17 receptions for 336 yards and three touchdowns… Had 17 tackles, three interceptions, one pass broken up, one fumble caused and one fumble recovered. | | | | | | |
| **Cameron Little** | K/P | 6-2 | 188 | ★★★ | Moore, OK | Southmoore |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 1 kicker nationally… Handled placekicking, kickoff and punting duties… Made 6 of 10 field goals attempted with a long of 49 yards as a senior… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game. | | | | | | |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Chase Lowry** | DB | 6-0 | 180 | ★★★ | Frisco, TX | Frisco |
| Ranked No. 42 cornerback nationally and No. 74 player in Texas by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had 14 receptions for 403 yards and two touchdowns, averaging 28.8 yards per reception… Had 26 tackles, four interceptions, one pass broken up, one fumble caused and one fumble recovered. | | | | | | |
| **Devon Manuel** | OL | 6-9 | 292 | ★★★ | Sunset, LA | Beau Chene |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 78 offensive tackle nationally and No. 28 player in Louisiana. | | | | | | |
| **Erin Outley** | TE | 6-4 | 255 | ★★★ | Little Rock | Parkview |
| Missed most of season due to meniscus injury… As a junior, had 48 receptions for 721 yards and eight touchdowns, averaging 15 yards per reception. | | | | | | |
| **Keuan Parker** | DB | 5-11 | 173 | ★★★ | Tulsa, OK | Booker T. Washington |
| Ranked No. 32 cornerback nationally and No. 10 player in Oklahoma by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had 20 tackles, including one tackle for loss, one interception and one fumble caused… Had 45 tackles, one quarterback sack, two interceptions, and 14 passes broken up as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Christopher Paul Jr.** | LB | 6-1 | 240 | ★★★ | Cordele, GA | Crisp County |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 22 inside linebacker nationally… Had 91 tackles, including 20 tackles for loss, 2.5 quarterback sacks, one fumble caused and blocked one punt as a senior… As a junior, had 157 tackles, including 10 tackles for loss, and 4.5 quarterback sacks. | | | | | | |
| **Landon Rogers** | QB | 6-4 | 215 | ★★★ | Little Rock | Parkview |
| Ranked No. 35 dual-threat quarterback nationally by 247Sports.com… As a senior, completed 92 of 150 passes for 1,247 yards and six touchdowns… Had 1,148 yards rushing and 22 touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Raheim Sanders** | WR | 6-2 | 220 | ★★★★ | Rockledge, FL | Rockledge |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 8 athlete nationally and No. 19 player in Florida… Had 317 yards rushing and four touchdowns as a senior… Had 24 receptions for 391 yards and four touchdowns, averaging 16.3 yards per reception… Had 237 kick return yards and scored one touchdown. | | | | | | |
| **Bryce Stephens** | WR | 6-0 | 170 | ★★★ | Oklahoma City, OK | John Marshall |
| As a senior, had 32 receptions for 686 yards and nine touchdowns, averaging 21.4 yards per reception. | | | | | | |
| **Terry Wells** | OL | 6-5 | 306 | ★★★★ | Parkin | Wynne |
| Ranked No. 2 player in Arkansas by 247Sports.com… Helped team to 13-1 record and state championship game as a senior. | | | | | | |
| **Jalen Williams** | DL | 6-3 | 305 | ★★★ | Tylertown, MS | Jones College |
| As a sophomore, had 30 tackles, including 2.5 tackles for loss, and one quarterback sack… Had 28 tackles, including four tackles for loss, one quarterback sack and two quarterback hurries as a freshman. | | | | | | |
| **Jaedon Wilson** | WR | 6-3 | 175 | ★★★ | DeSoto, TX | DeSoto |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 96 wide receiver nationally and No. 96 player in Texas… Had 25 receptions for 488 yards and eight touchdowns as a senior, averaging 19.5 yards per reception… As a junior, had 28 receptions for 520 yards and seven touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Solomon Wright** | DL | 6-0 | 270 | ★★★ | Vian, OK | Vian |
| Ranked No. 26 defensive tackle nationally and No. 9 player in Oklahoma by 247Sports.com… Had 124 tackles and 14 quarterback sacks as a junior and helped team to a 12-2 record and the state championship game. | | | | | | |

# PLAYER PROFILE

## Morgan's Return a Gift for Hogs Defense

On Christmas Day Grant Morgan presented Arkansas the present of his presence.

"Merry Christmas!" the Razorbacks linebacker posted on Twitter. "I'm not done being a Hog. My work here is unfinished. The best is yet to come. 31 is back!"

If Morgan's 2021 proves better than his 2020, then coach Sam Pittman and the Razorbacks couldn't have opened a better Christmas present.

Morgan was originally a 2016 walk-on out of Greenwood, first known to Razorbacks fans as the brother of Drew Morgan, an Arkansas receiver from 2013 to 2017. But Grant and his No. 31 jersey have now become a Razorbacks name and number in their own right.

After redshirting in 2016, Grant lettered as a valuable, versatile reserve from 2017-2019. Then, he turned into a star in 2020, in the first season under Pittman and defensive coordinator Barry Odom.

Starting with 15 tackles in the season-opener against Georgia in his first start ever, the middle linebacker compiled a season so great that he was named first-team All-SEC and voted second-team on two All-American teams and third team on another.

He was a finalist for the Burlsworth Award, the award named for the late Razorbacks All-American Brandon Burlsworth nationally honoring a player who was originally a walk-on.

Morgan finished second in the SEC with 111 tackles, with 7.5 for loss, including two sacks. He was credited with two quarterback hurries, broke up five passes and intercepted one that he returned for a 23-yard touchdown, sealing the 33-21 victory at Ole Miss.

A married pre-med kinesiology major already with his undergraduate degree, plus a Masters of Science in Operations Management, Morgan easily could have said, "My work is done here."

But with the NCAA granting another year of eligibility because of COVID-19, Morgan wanted to come back for more.

If he simply duplicates his 2020 season, that would more than suffice.

But Morgan vows on bettering it.

Based on Morgan's conditioning regime, Pittman believes he will.

"He's changed his body," Pittman said of Morgan.

"Grant was a slippery guy. Now he's like a pitcher who has a fastball and a curve and a changeup. Now he can go through blockers, slip them and do some other things. He improved his arsenal simply because he got bigger and stronger. I like him a lot."

LB
**Grant Morgan**
Photo by AP Photo/Michael Woods

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# BEST AND BRIGHTEST

## MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

### S JALEN CATALON

As a redshirt freshman last season, Catalon was recognized as first-team All-SEC and Freshman All-American. He logged three interceptions, one returned for a 35-yard touchdown against Ole Miss, and 99 tackles. … Coach Sam Pittman emphasized Catalon's value by pointing to his controversial targeting ejection that ending a 16-tackle performance against LSU, which then rallied for a 27-24 win. "I think you saw when he left the LSU game how much it hurt us," Pittman said.

## EMERGING STAR

### C RICKY STROMBERG

From a true freshman guard forced to take his lumps starting for a 2-10 Razorbacks team in 2019 to the improving center on last season's 3-7 team, Stromberg has evolved into an All-SEC possibility, coach Sam Pittman said. … "He has the potential to do that," Pittman said. "Obviously, he has a lot of work to do because he's only played center for one year. But I believe he could, with this year and another year, certainly be an All-SEC type player."

## TOP NEWCOMER

### S JAYDEN JOHNSON

Even on a veteran secondary that coach Sam Pittman lauds, Johnson finished spring drills on the second team after enrolling early as a freshman. … "He basically was able to come in here with his size, with his brains with his strength and walk right in and be a force," Pittman said. … Johnson was a consensus three-star recruit from Cedartown, Ga.

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# AUBURN TIGERS

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**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Mike Bobo **DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Derek Mason **STADIUM:** Jordan-Hare Stadium: 87,451

## HARSIN ERA BEGINS IN RUGGED SEC WEST

Any time there's a big-time coaching change in college football, the rumor mill goes full throttle.

So, when Auburn ponied up $21.5 million in severance pay to part ways with Gus Malzahn following a 6-5 season, the "potential candidates" odometer ramped into overdrive.

First, it was Oregon head man Mario Cristobal, who agreed to a contract extension to stay with the Ducks.

Then it was Louisiana head coach Billy Napier, who turned down an SEC gig to stay in the Sun Belt.

Next up: UAB head coach Bill Clark, who remained loyal to a program that he rebuilt — and will have a brand-new stadium to play in this fall.

But regardless of what happened behind the scenes, athletic director Alan Greene, who was making his first football hire as an Auburn decision-maker, picked *his guy* — Bryan Harsin — to lead the program.

And it all started with a chance meeting between the two while they were on vacation a few years ago.

"I remember thinking, I like that (Bryan Harsin) guy," Greene recalled. "He is a demanding competitor. It takes a unique person to be a head coach in the SEC. And Bryan is willing, ready and able to take it on."

Harsin has brought a detail-oriented, hard-nosed approach to his new team. He also surrounded himself with an energetic staff, whom the players gravitated to in the spring.

"They've been great," linebacker Owen Pappoe said. "They've brought a lot of energy and discipline to the team and they are working hard to coach us up. I feel like the schemes they are putting in place fit our personnel well."

Brad Bedell (tight ends), Bert Watts (outside linebackers/special teams), Jeff Schmedding (inside linebackers), Jeff Pitman (strength and conditioning) and Brad Larrondo (football chief of staff) made the trip with Harsin from Boise State, where he was 69-19 in seven seasons.

Zac Etheridge (cornerbacks), Will Friend (offensive line), Cornelius Williams (receivers), Nick Eason (defensive line), Mike Bobo (offensive coordinator), Derek Mason (defensive coordinator) and Carnell Williams (running backs), the lone holdover from the last regime, round out the staff.

Schmedding, who is overseeing one of the most talented position groups on the team, described his boss in one word: "Disciplined."

"Everything he does is about doing things the right way and about player development," Schmedding said. "That's what we really focus on, developing players."

Another thing Harsin focused on this offseason was a "1-0" mentality. That means all involved — coaches, players, staff — in the program aiming to win every day. So far, the message has been well received.

"We want to go '1-0' every week,'" Pappoe added. "That's our goal."

## OFFENSE

Mike Bobo is a veteran play-caller who will implement a pro-style, multi-formation, attack that will have the quarterback operate under center and in the shotgun. It will be interesting to see how his new system, which will also implement a lot of pre-snap motion, will use the unique talents of Bo Nix and Tank Bigsby, back-to-back SEC Freshman of the Year honorees.

Nix took a step backward as a sophomore. Some of that regression was due to inconsistent O-line play, but the rising junior's decision-making was sporadic, leading Bobo to harp on the importance of his quarterback making good decisions with the football in the spring.

Bigsby, a relentless runner who owns a ferocious stiff arm, has the talent to contend for the league rushing title. Last year he rushed for 834 yards and five TDs. Shaun Shivers is just 5-foot-7, but he offers a quick and powerful change of pace.

Elijah Canion, Kobe Hudson, Shedrick Jackson, Ze'Vian Capers and Ja'Varrius Johnson are in line to play significant roles in a rebuilding receiving corps.

In his only major action a year ago, Can-

## SCHEDULE

| Date | Opponent | '20Record |
|---|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | AKRON | 1-5 |
| Sept. 11 | ALABAMA STATE | 3-3 |
| Sept. 18 | at Penn State | 4-5 |
| Sept. 25 | GEORGIA STATE | 6-4 |
| Oct. 2 | at LSU | 5-5 |
| Oct. 9 | GEORGIA | 8-2 |
| Oct. 16 | at Arkansas | 3-7 |
| Oct. 30 | OLE MISS | 5-5 |
| Nov. 6 | at Texas A&M | 9-1 |
| Nov. 13 | MISSISSIPPI STATE | 4-7 |
| Nov. 20 | at South Carolina | 2-8 |
| Nov. 27 | ALABAMA | 13-0 |

## RESULTS

| 6-5, 6-4 | | |
|---|---|---|
| W | KENTUCKY | 29-13 |
| L | at Georgia | 6-27 |
| W | ARKANSAS | 30-28 |
| L | at South Carolina | 22-30 |
| W | at Ole Miss | 35-28 |
| W | LSU | 48-11 |
| W | TENNESSEE | 30-17 |
| L | at Alabama | 13-42 |
| L | TEXAS A&M | 20-31 |
| W | at Mississippi State | 24-10 |
| | **CITRUS BOWL** | |
| L | vs. Northwestern | 19-35 |

## 10-YEAR WINNING TREND

## AT A GLANCE

### LOCATION:
Auburn, Ala.

### 2020:
6-5 overall, 6-4 SEC (3rd, West)

### COACH:
Bryan Harsin — At Auburn: 1st year; overall: 76-24, 8 years

### RETURNING STARTERS:
17; 9 offense, 6 defense, kicker, punter

### PLAYERS TO WATCH:
QB Bo Nix, RB Tank Bigsby, WR Elijah Canion, DE Colby Wooden, EDGE Derick Hall, LB Zakoby McClain, LB Owen Pappoe, CB Roger McCreary, S Smoke Monday

### PRIMARY STRENGTHS:
Nix and Bigsby are dynamic playmakers and team leaders. The tight end position has versatility, and the offensive line is experienced. The defensive line has size/depth, and the linebackers are active playmakers. The secondary should be among the best in the SEC.

### POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:
There is little depth at QB and RB, so a significant injury would be catastrophic. The receiving corps is learning a new system and is unproven. If the offensive line doesn't improve, Auburn will again struggle to score points. Rushing the passer could be a problem again.

### KEY LOSSES:
WR Anthony Schwartz, WR Seth Williams, LB K.J. Britt, S Jamien Sherwood

### OVERVIEW:
The coaching move to Harsin might be just what Auburn needed, returning the focus to fundamentals. If the offensive line elevates its game, Nix eliminates costly mistakes, and the defense can get off the dang field (50.3-percent conversion rate was worst in the SEC and No. 121 in the country), Auburn will play meaningful games in November.

### KEY NUMBER:
**90** The national rank of Auburn's time of possession last season, averaging out to 28 minutes per game. Longer, more sustained drives could be beneficial for the offense and defense this fall.

RB
Tank
BIGSBY

Photo by AP Photo/Butch Dill

QB

**Bo Nix**

Photo by Joe Robbins

## SCOUTING REPORT: Offense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | **Bo Nix*** | Jr. | Operating in new system, expect a rebound year; relentless worker. | Grant Loy, Sr. |
| RB | **Tank Bigsby*** | So. | Gifted athlete; has power/speed to dominate a game; team leader. | Shaun Shivers, Sr. |
| WR | Elijah Canion | So. | Rangy wideout who could be primed for a breakout. | Caylin Newton, Sr. |
| WR | Ja'Varrius Johnson | So. | Slot WRs thrive in Harsin's scheme; has speed, work ethic to be a star. | **Shedrick Jackson, Sr.*** |
| WR | Kobe Hudson | So. | One of several WR candidates who have a golden opportunity. | Malcolm Johnson Jr., So. |
| TE | Luke Deal | So. | One of many talented options at tight end; had a strong spring. | **John Samuel Shenker, Sr.*** |
| LT | **Alec Jackson*** | Sr. | Was limited in spring but is in line to play a key role up front. | Austin Troxell, Sr. |
| LG | **Tashawn Manning*** | Sr. | Steady performer, one of two Auburn OGs that go 330-plus. | Brandon Council, Sr. |
| C | **Nick Brahms*** | Sr. | Team leader who feels he'll operate better in new offense. | Jalil Irvin, Jr. |
| RG | **Keiondre Jones*** | So. | Has all-conference potential; blocked for Bigsby in high school. | Kameron Stutts Jr. |
| RT | **Brodarious Hamm*** | Sr. | Massive blocker (6-6, 334) should flourish in new pro-style system. | Brenden Coffey, Sr. |
| K | **Anders Carlson*** | Sr. | Strong, accurate leg could be X-factor in tight games. | Ben Patton, So. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

## SCOUTING REPORT: Defense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | **Colby Wooden*** | So. | Physically gifted player, can play the run and get after the QB. | Zykeivous Walker, So. |
| DT | **Tyrone Truesdell*** | Sr. | Made smart decision by returning; has to raise level of play. | Tony Fair, Sr. |
| DT | Marquis Burks | Sr. | Had a great spring; size and quickness could be calling cards. | Dre Butler, Jr. |
| EDGE | Derick Hall | Jr. | Rangy pass-rusher could be in line for a breakout season. | T.D. Moultry, Sr. |
| EDGE | Caleb Johnson | Jr. | Could blossom in new defense; has size to hold up vs. run. | Romello Height, So. |
| LB | **Zakoby McClain*** | Sr. | Plays with reckless abandon; team leader; fearless competitor. | Wesley Steiner, So. |
| LB | **Owen Pappoe*** | Jr. | Speedy playmaker; said new defense allows for "clean run fits." | Chandler Wooten, Sr. |
| CB | **Roger McCreary*** | Sr. | One of the SEC's best corners; competitor; physical hitter. | Dreshun Miller, Jr. |
| CB | Jaylin Simpson | So. | Dealt with injuries last season but has big upside; fiery player. | Bydarrius Knighten, Sr. |
| S | **Smoke Monday*** | Sr. | Hard hitter with good range; talent could shine in new scheme. | Donovan Kaufman, Fr. |
| S | Ladarius Tennison | So. | Broke into experienced secondary as true freshman, good football IQ. | Trey Elston, Sr. |
| P | **Oscar Chapman*** | So. | Gets nice hang time; forced 14 fair catches on 28 attempts in 2020. | Aidan Marshall, Sr. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

ion built a nice rapport with Nix in the Citrus Bowl loss versus Northwestern. The two hooked up three times for 80 yards, which included a 57-yard pass and score.

Canion's size (6-4, 214) and wide catch radius could be an issue for opposing defenders in an expanded role this fall. Johnson, who will operate in the slot, impressed the new staff — and teammates — with his speed, quickness and work ethic in the spring.

"He really stood out to me," Bigsby said. "He's going to be able to help us in a lot of ways."

More pass-catchers were expected to be added via the transfer portal prior to fall camp.

In the revamped offense, look for the tight end position to play a vital role after four players produced a combined 20 receptions, 178 yards and zero scores a year ago.

With John Samuel Shenker occupied with baseball, Luke Deal, Tyler Fromm and Brandon Frazier showcased their talents to the new staff in the spring — and performed well. Deal and Fromm, both 6-5, are willing blockers and reliable receivers. Frazier's size (6-7, 267) could be a matchup nightmare for opponents, especially in the red zone.

"Tight end play is a critical part of our offensive attack," Harsin said.

Left tackle Alec Jackson, center Nick Brahms and right tackle Brodarious Hamm anchor one the SEC's most experienced offensive lines. But Keiondre Jones may be the unit's best player.

Brandon Council, arguably the team's best O-lineman in 2020, missed spring workouts (knee), but will return in the fall.

## DEFENSE

Auburn will attack using multiple formations with new coordinator Derek Mason calling the plays. Unlike previous seasons under Kevin Steele, it will also play more zone coverage.

Still, a strong front wall will be vital to the team's success, especially when trying to limit an opponent's running game in a base 3-4 defense.

After the departures of Derrick Brown and Marlon Davidson, a drop-off was expected along Auburn's defensive line a year ago. But due to a youth movement and a couple of starters not fulfilling their potential, the unit got pushed around far too often, especially against its toughest opponents (Georgia, Texas A&M and Alabama).

That will need to change if the Tigers want to make a significant leap on defense. Improvement could come due to Mason's coaching acumen, along with the maturation of guys like Derick Hall, Zykeivous Walker, Colby Wooden, Marquis Burks, Dre Butler, J.J. Pegues — who moved to the defensive line from tight end — and Romello Height.

"I feel like the team has really picked up the defense," linebacker Zakoby McClain said. "I think it fits our personnel well and allows us to play fast. We are also playing more zone, so I also think that will help us."

Tyrone Truesdell's decision to return to the team was huge. He's being counted on to be an effective run stopper on early

## TOP 5 NFL PROSPECTS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Bo Nix** | **QB** | **6-3** | **214** | **4.67** | **Jr.** |

Entering his third season as the starter, Nix has endured his fair share of peaks and valleys throughout his Tigers career. After a rough loss to No. 1 Alabama in late November (23 of 38 for 227 yards with two interceptions), he bounced back and didn't have an interception in the final three games of the season. In the postseason against a good Northwestern team, was 25 of 42 for 292 yards with a touchdown in a Citrus Bowl loss.

Through it all, Nix possesses a fluid release, is a quick decision-maker and thrives in the RPO offensive attack due to his ability to extend plays. In addition, he shows sound mechanics, to go along with excellent footwork and the ability to make off-platform throws. With his propensity to pull off some occasional big wins, as he did during his freshman campaign, Nix is one of the most volatile prospects for the 2022 NFL Draft.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2. Owen Pappoe** | **LB** | **6-1** | **226** | **4.49** | **Jr.** |
| **3. Roger McCreary** | **CB** | **6-0** | **190** | **4.50** | **Sr.** |
| **4. Smoke Monday** | **S** | **6-3** | **199** | **4.53** | **Sr.** |
| **5. Nehemiah Pritchett** | **DB** | **6-1** | **179** | **4.46** | **Jr.** |

— Ric Serritella, NFL Draft Bible

downs in the new defensive scheme.

Graduate transfer Tony Fair (21 tackles, three TFLs, a sack and a fumble recovery in 2020) is another big-bodied defender who should help bolster a revamped run D that ranked 62 nationally (163.4 ypg.) a year ago.

Colby Wooden (a team-high 9.5 tackles for loss a year ago) is an emerging star and is arguably the team's best pass rusher. Burks, a spring standout, is also in line to play a key role up front.

McClain (team-leading 113 tackles) and Pappoe (93 tackles, four sacks) anchor one of the nation's strongest linebacking units. Chandler Wooten, who sat out last season, and Wesley Steiner, a physical hitter, will also play significant roles.

The "Edge" position — a hybrid LB/DE — is a critical spot, the coaches say, within the new D. Hall (3.5 sacks) and T.D. Moultry, along with Caleb Johnson and Height, are expected to provide a more-consistent pass rush. Northwestern transfer Eku Leota (13 tackles, four sacks, 5.5 tackles for loss a year ago) could also help.

Roger McCreary, one of the league's top cover corners, and rangy safety Smoke Monday, a physical striker, are the stalwarts in a talented secondary.

But nickel back Nehemiah Pritchett, corner Jaylin Simpson and savvy safety Ladarius Tennison are rising stars. Play-making transfers Dreshun Miller and Bydarrius Knighten could make instant impacts in the fall.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Anders Carlson (53 career FGs, including 20-for-22 last season) is one of the best kickers in the conference and could be in line for a monster season. Last year he went 5 of 5 on field goals of 40 to 49 yards and 2 of 3 on kicks from 50-plus. Carlson doubles as the team's primary kickoff man (37 touchbacks on 60 attempts).

Oscar Chapman and Aidan Marshall are competing for the punting duties. Chapman averaged 41 yards per punt a year ago, while Marshall averaged 42 per boot.

LB

**Owen Pappoe**

Photo by Joe Robbins

Ja'Varrius Johnson and Hudson are candidates to return punts. Bigsby and Shivers give the Tigers two home run threats as kick returners. Jacob Quattlebaum should handle the long snapping chores.

## SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

Auburn should open the Harsin era 2-0 before a showdown with perennial Big Ten power Penn State in Week Three. A win in Happy Valley would be a major confidence booster for the Tigers two weeks before a road trip to Baton Rouge, a place where Auburn hasn't won since 1999.

Following the trip to LSU, the Tigers return home to face rival Georgia, who has won four consecutive meetings dating back to the 2017 SEC Championship Game.

Auburn will alternate home and away games for its final six games, which includes meetings with Ole Miss and Mississippi State at home and road trips to Arkansas, Texas A&M and South Carolina before Round 1 of Harsin vs. Nick Saban in the Iron Bowl — in Jordan-Hare.

— Matt Lowe

### 2018 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 30.9 | 47 |
| Rushing | 167.5 | 68 |
| Passing | 222.5 | 74 |
| Total | 389.9 | 78 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 19.2 | 14 |
| Rushing | 135.9 | 32 |
| Passing | 219.5 | 58 |
| Total | 355.4 | 38 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 9 | + 0.69 | T-16 |

### 2019 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 33.2 | T-28 |
| Rushing | 199.1 | 33 |
| Passing | 207.5 | 87 |
| Total | 406.5 | 64 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 19.5 | 17 |
| Rushing | 123.2 | 25 |
| Passing | 213.8 | 47 |
| Total | 337.0 | 28 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 6 | + 0.46 | T-27 |

### 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 25.1 | 89 |
| Rushing | 162.5 | 67 |
| Passing | 220.3 | 71 |
| Total | 382.8 | 77 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 24.7 | 38 |
| Rushing | 163.4 | 62 |
| Passing | 242.6 | 79 |
| Total | 406.0 | 63 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 4 | + 0.36 | T-38 |

# NOTEBOOK

At the conclusion of spring practice, the Auburn coaching staff turned its attention to the transfer portal in an attempt to round out its roster. Three big pickups were graduate transfers **Tony Fair** (UAB), **Bydarrius Knighten** (Southeast Missouri State) and **Donovan Kaufman** (Vanderbilt).

At 6-3, 345 pounds, Fair played a major role in the Blazers finishing eighth nationally in run defense a year ago and should carve a niche in new defensive coordinator **Derek Mason**'s defense.

Knighten covers ground quickly in the secondary and is an excellent open-field tackler. Kaufman (5-10, 197), a former four-star recruit, can play corner or safety and averaged over 27 yards per kick return last season at Vandy before being shelved due to myocarditis. He has four years of eligibility remaining.

Fair and Knighten have one year of eligibility remaining.

Look for Auburn to continue to add via the transfer portal at the following positions: quarterback, running back, receiver, offensive tackle, defensive end, defensive back and possibly punter as the summer progresses.

• The tight end position was the talk of spring. Seldom used by the previous staff, look for a major uptick in production in the pass/run game from a position group that oozes potential.

"That group really performed well this spring. I was really impressed with them. Lot of interchangeable parts," **Schmedding** said.

Sure-handed **John Samuel Shenker** (6-4, 249), who plays on the Auburn baseball team, has been the team's starting tight end the past two seasons and had nine receptions for 97 yards in 11 games last year.

**Brandon Frazier** caught the eye of the new staff and could be a matchup nightmare for opposing linebackers and defensive backs due to his height and wide catch radius. **Luke Deal,** who started the A-Day Game, and **Tyler Fromm**, brother of former Georgia quarterback Jake Fromm, played at a high level in the spring.

• If Auburn goes with **Alec Jackson**, **Tashawn Manning, Nick Brahms, Keiondre Jones** and **Brodarious Hamm** as its starting offensive line, the group will average 6-foot-4, 327.8 pounds per man.

"We've been working on FBI (Football Intelligence) this spring." Brahms said. "Communications and calls, learning how to communicate with each other."

## OPPOSING COACHES VIEW

• "I don't think Auburn has recruited that well the last few years. There's no (defensive tackle) Derek Brown, the linebackers are small and undersized and the secondary is suspect. ...

• "Bryan Harsin is old school. That will help Auburn. And they need somebody to make the quarterback better. The coaching of Bo Nix has been criminal, knowing his talent level. He's not performed at half the level he's capable of. Put him in a good system and coach him the right way and he can really be good. He's got a good running back (Tank Bigsby), but he lost two good receivers (Anthony Schwartz and Seth Williams). ...

• "The defensive coordinator (Derek Mason) they hired from Vanderbilt is a really good defensive coach. The problem with Auburn's offense was Gus Malzahn was like a squirrel in the middle of the road; he could never make up his mind about who should run the offense."

# TIGERS SPRING ROSTER

| Quarterback | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18 Dematrius Davis | QB | 5-10 | 202 | Fr. | Houston, TX |
| 13 Trey Lindsey | QB | 6-1 | 204 | So. | Montgomery |
| 14 Grant Loy | QB | 6-4 | 226 | Sr. | New Washington, OH |
| 10 Bo Nix | QB | 6-3 | 214 | Jr. | Pinson |
| 20 Sawyer Pate | QB | 6-1 | 205 | So. | Alabaster |
| **Running Back** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 22 Devan Barrett | RB | 6-0 | 195 | Sr. | Tampa, FL |
| 4 Tank Bigsby | RB | 6-0 | 208 | So. | LaGrange, GA |
| 46 Jacob Jasinski | RB | 5-10 | 200 | Jr. | Birmingham |
| 44 Jay Sharp | RB | 5-8 | 164 | Fr. | Birmingham |
| 8 Shaun Shivers | RB | 5-7 | 189 | Sr. | Fort Lauderdale, FL |
| **Wide Receivers** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 28 Jackson Billings | WR | 5-10 | 179 | So. | Huntsville |
| 17 Elijah Canion | WR | 6-4 | 214 | So. | Hollywood, FL |
| 80 Ze'Vian Capers | WR | 6-4 | 195 | So. | Alpharetta, GA |
| 81 J.J. Evans | WR | 6-2 | 224 | Fr. | Montevallo |
| 5 Kobe Hudson | WR | 6-1 | 199 | So. | Pine Mountain, GA |
| 11 Shedrick Jackson | WR | 6-2 | 196 | Sr. | Hoover |
| 16 Malcolm Johnson Jr. | WR | 6-1 | 195 | So. | Bryans Road, MD |
| 6 Ja'Varrius Johnson | WR | 5-10 | 159 | So. | Trussville |
| 32 Trent Mason | WR | 6-1 | 187 | So. | Lakeland, FL |
| 84 Jackson McFadden | WR | 6-1 | 198 | Jr. | Nashville, TN |
| 35 James Owens Moss | WR | 5-10 | 191 | Sr. | Opelika |
| 30 Tommy Nesmith | WR | 6-0 | 180 | So. | Auburn |
| 25 Caylin Newton | WR | 6-0 | 209 | Sr. | Atlanta, GA |
| 83 Malcolm Russell | WR | 6-0 | 198 | Jr. | Pelham |
| **Tight Ends** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 82 Hayden Brice | TE | 6-3 | 222 | Sr. | Jackson, MS |
| 86 Luke Deal | TE | 6-5 | 255 | So. | Greenwood, SC |
| 40 Flynn Driscoll | TE | 6-6 | 242 | Jr. | Madison, CT |
| 87 Brandon Frazier | TE | 6-7 | 267 | So. | McKinney, TX |
| 85 Tyler Fromm | TE | 6-5 | 240 | So. | Warner Robins, GA |
| 40 Landen King | TE | 6-5 | 214 | Fr. | Beaumont, TX |
| 47 John Samuel Shenker | TE | 6-4 | 249 | Sr. | Albany, GA |
| **Offensive Lineman** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 52 Nick Brahms | OL | 6-4 | 302 | Sr. | Navarre, FL |
| 55 Brenden Coffey | OL | 6-7 | 292 | Sr. | Paradise, CA |
| 71 Brandon Council | OL | 6-4 | 335 | Sr. | Tar Heel, NC |
| 59 Brodarious Hamm | OL | 6-6 | 334 | Sr. | Griffin, GA |
| 50 Jalil Irvin | OL | 6-3 | 319 | Jr. | Stone Mountain, GA |
| 65 Alec Jackson | OL | 6-5 | 323 | Sr. | Montgomery |
| 57 Avery Jernigan | OL | 6-4 | 312 | Fr. | Blackshear, GA |
| 54 Tate Johnson | OL | 6-4 | 312 | So. | LaGrange, GA |
| 58 Keiondre Jones | OL | 6-4 | 345 | So. | LaGrange, GA |
| 74 Garner Langlo | OL | 6-6 | 277 | Fr. | Inverness, FL |
| 56 Tashawn Manning | OL | 6-4 | 335 | Sr. | Apopka, FL |
| 72 Prince Micheal Sammons | OL | 6-7 | 307 | Sr. | Blanchester, OH |
| 70 David Shannon | OL | 6-7 | 275 | Sr. | Birmingham |
| 62 Kameron Stutts | OL | 6-5 | 337 | Jr. | Killen |
| 68 Austin Troxell | OL | 6-7 | 305 | Sr. | Huntsville |
| 77 Kilian Zierer | OL | 6-7 | 298 | Jr. | Munich, GER |
| **Defensive Lineman** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 92 Marquis Burks | DT | 6-3 | 314 | Sr. | Chicago, IL |
| 49 Dre Butler | DT | 6-5 | 298 | Jr. | Covington, GA |
| 95 Nick Curtis | DT | 6-5 | 210 | Fr. | Birmingham |
| Tony Fair | DT | 6-3 | 335 | Sr. | South Bend, IN |
| 90 Daniel Foster-Allen | DE | 6-4 | 258 | Fr. | Mobile |
| 29 Derick Hall | Edge | 6-3 | 251 | Jr. | Gulfport, MS |
| 37 Romello Height | Edge | 6-3 | 214 | So. | Dublin, GA |
| 44 Lee Hunter | DT | 6-4 | 321 | Fr. | Mobile |
| 45 Caleb Johnson | Edge | 6-3 | 276 | Jr. | Columbus, GA |
| Eku Leota | Edge | 6-4 | 250 | Jr. | Asheville, NC |
| 99 T.D. Moultry | Edge | 6-2 | 253 | Sr. | Birmingham |
| 89 J.J. Pegues | DT | 6-3 | 308 | So. | Oxford, MS |
| 94 Tyrone Truesdell | DT | 6-2 | 335 | Sr. | Augusta, GA |
| 3 Zykeivous Walker | DT | 6-4 | 289 | So. | Ellaville, GA |
| 25 Colby Wooden | DE | 6-5 | 278 | So. | Lawrenceville, GA |
| 76 Jeremiah Wright | DT | 6-5 | 338 | So. | Selma |
| **Linebackers** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 43 Kameron Brown | LB | 6-0 | 239 | So. | Sugar Hill, GA |
| 51 Barton Lester | LB | 6-3 | 215 | Sr. | Montgomery |
| 46 Jake Levant | LB | 6-1 | 225 | Fr. | Vestavia Hills |
| 52 Russ Logan | LB | 5-11 | 206 | Jr. | Eutaw |
| 9 Zakoby McClain | LB | 6-0 | 219 | Sr. | Valdosta, GA |
| 0 Owen Pappoe | LB | 6-1 | 226 | Jr. | Lawrenceville, GA |
| 35 Cam Riley | LB | 6-5 | 219 | So. | Evergreen |
| 32 Wesley Steiner | LB | 6-0 | 229 | So. | Warner Robins, GA |
| 30 Desmond Tisdol | LB | 6-0 | 236 | So. | Rochelle, GA |
| 57 Brooks Walton | LB | 6-0 | 213 | Jr. | Little Rock, AR |
| 31 Chandler Wooten | LB | 6-3 | 232 | Sr. | Acworth, GA |
| **Defensive Backs** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 16 Malcolm Askew | DB | 5-11 | 186 | Sr. | McCalla |
| 12 Sammy Cohen | S | 6-1 | 222 | So. | Marietta, GA |
| 22 Trey Elston | CB | 6-1 | 193 | Sr. | Auburn |
| 28 Devin Guice | S | 5-9 | 165 | Sr. | Opelika |
| 38 Ahmari Harvey | S | 6-0 | 172 | Fr. | Tallahassee, FL |
| Donovan Kaufman | S | 5-10 | 197 | Fr. | New Orleans, LA |
| Bydarrius Knighten | CB | 6-0 | 200 | Sr. | Tunica, MS |
| Dreshun Miller | CB | 6-1 | 192 | Jr. | Atlanta, GA |
| 23 Roger McCreary | CB | 6-0 | 190 | Sr. | Mobile |
| 21 Smoke Monday | S | 6-3 | 199 | Sr. | Atlanta, GA |
| 18 Nehemiah Pritchett | CB | 6-1 | 179 | Jr. | Jackson |
| 11 Zion Puckett | S | 6-0 | 209 | So. | Griffin, GA |
| 24 Eric Reed Jr. | S | 6-0 | 200 | So. | Shreveport, LA |
| 36 Jaylin Simpson | CB | 6-1 | 175 | So. | Brunswick, GA |
| 13 Ladarius Tennison | S | 5-10 | 198 | So. | Rockledge, FL |
| **Specialist** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 26 Anders Carlson | K | 6-5 | 220 | Sr. | Colorado Springs, CO |
| 91 Oscar Chapman | P | 6-3 | 197 | So. | Adelaide, AUS |
| 61 Reed Hughes | LS | 6-1 | 221 | Fr. | Conway, AR |
| 41 Aidan Marshall | P | 6-0 | 213 | Sr. | Winchester, VA |
| 93 Evan McGuire | K | 6-2 | 229 | Fr. | Alabaster |
| 39 Marshall Meyers | P | 5-8 | 197 | Fr. | Opelika |
| 96 Ben Patton | K | 5-10 | 205 | So. | Rochester, MI |
| 67 Jacob Quattlebaum | LS | 6-1 | 223 | Jr. | Enterprise |

# INDIVIDUAL STATS

## PASSING

| NAME | GP | Effic | Cmp | Att | Int | Pct | Yards | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| B. Nix | 11 | 123.9 | 214 | 357 | 7 | 59.9 | 2415 | 12 | 91 | 219.6 |
| C. Sandberg | 1 | 167.2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 100.0 | 8 | 0 | 8 | 8.0 |

## RECEIVING

| RECEIVING | GP | No. | Yards | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S. Williams | 11 | 47 | 760 | 16.2 | 4 | 58 | 69.1 |
| A. Schwartz | 10 | 54 | 636 | 11.8 | 3 | 91 | 63.6 |
| E. Stove | 10 | 44 | 359 | 8.2 | 3 | 38 | 35.9 |

## RUSHING

| RUSHING | GP | Att. | Gain | Loss | Net | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| T. Bigsby | 10 | 138 | 856 | 22 | 834 | 6.0 | 5 | 42 | 83.4 |
| B. Nix | 11 | 108 | 508 | 120 | 388 | 3.6 | 7 | 22 | 35.3 |
| S. Shivers | 8 | 62 | 291 | 15 | 276 | 4.5 | 1 | 29 | 34.5 |

## DEF. LEADERS

Tackles: Z. McClain 113, O. Pappoe 93, J. Sherwood 75
Tackles for loss: C. Wooden 9.5, R. McCreary 7, O. Pappoe 6
Sacks: C. Wooden 4, O. Pappoe 4, D. Hall 3.5, two tied with 3
Interceptions: R. McCreary 3, S. Monday 2, four tied with 1

# 247SPORTS TIGERS RECRUITING 2021

## 3 NEWCOMERS OF IMPACT

### Lee Hunter

One of only two top-100 recruits in Auburn's 2021 class, Hunter is a powerful defensive tackle with a high motor. Even better, he arrived in January as an early enrollee. With another tackle, Jeremiah Wright, sustaining a torn ACL in March, the opening is there for Hunter to get into the rotation.

### Eku Leota

The Tigers needed immediate help at the outside linebacker/edge position and should get it with Leota, a Northwestern grad transfer with three years of eligibility. He was third-team All-Big Ten last season and, in 18 career games with the Wildcats, finished with 10 tackles for loss and 6.5 sacks.

### Dreshun Miller

A West Virginia grad transfer, Miller is a talented cornerback who brings more experience to the Auburn secondary, and he very well could start in Week 1. Miller recorded 31 tackles, a team-high eight pass breakups and an interception in 2020 for a West Virginia's pass defense that led the country.

## SLEEPER

### Tar'varish Dawson

Arguably the most versatile member of Auburn's 2021 class, the speedy Dawson (who has clocked sub-10.6-seconds in the 100 meters) is slated to play slot receiver but also could be be used in the return game. His senior stats were off the charts: 28 receptions for 690 yards and nine touchdowns, seven interceptions and a punt return for a touchdown.

## 2022 NEEDS

Auburn has several, starting with offensive tackle, quarterback, defensive back and placekicker. Tackle recruiting was a weakness of the previous staff and Bryan Harsin inherited an average line by SEC standards because of it. At quarterback, the Tigers probably will sign two as the search for Bo Nix's successor is underway. In the secondary, key starters Roger McCreary and Smoke Monday will soon depart. At kicker, they need a replacement for four-year starter Anders Carlson.

— By Keith Niebuhr, AuburnUndercover.comi

## 247SPORTS COMPOSITE

| 5★ | 4★ | 3★ | 2★ |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 6 | 14 | 0 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Committments | 20 |
| Average Stars | 3.30 |
| Total Stars | 66 |
| National Rank: 19 | SEC: 7 |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Cayden Bridges** | CB | 6-2 | 190 | ★★★ | Magee, MS | Magee |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 32 player in Mississippi… As a senior, had 52 tackles, including six tackles for loss, and four interceptions. | | | | | | |
| **Dylan Brooks** | DE | 6-5 | 250 | ★★★★ | Roanoke | Handley |
| Ranked No. 76 player and No. 6 weakside defensive end nationally and No. 2 player in Alabama by 247Sports.com… Had 51 tackles and 5.5 quarterback sacks as a senior… Had 16 receptions for 212 yards and four touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Dematrius Davis** | QB | 5-10 | 202 | ★★★★ | Houston, TX | North Shore |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 8 dual-threat quarterback nationally and No. 34 player in Texas… Had 2,453 yards passing and 30 touchdowns with only one interception as a senior… Had 570 yards rushing and 14 touchdowns… As a junior, led team to 15-1 record and second consecutive state championship. | | | | | | |
| **Tar'varish Dawson** | WR | 5-10 | 175 | ★★★ | Lehigh Acres, FL | Lehigh Senior |
| Ranked No. 25 athlete nationally and No. 59 player in Florida by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had 28 receptions for 690 yards and nine touchdowns… Had 290 yards rushing and six touchdowns… Intercepted seven passes. | | | | | | |
| **Armani (A.D.) Diamond** | DB | 5-11 | 170 | ★★★ | Eight Mile | Blount |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 57 player in Alabama… Had 38 receptions for 759 yards and six touchdowns as a senior… Had 24 returns for 580 yards… Had 25 tackles, seven interceptions and 21 passes broken up… As a junior, had 31 tackles and eight passes broken up… Had 27 receptions for 619 yards and five touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Juwon Gaston** | DE | 5-11 | 187 | ★★★ | Birmingham | Carver |
| Ranked No. 49 safety nationally and No. 24 player in Alabama by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had 96 tackles and five interceptions… Returned seven kicks for touchdowns… Had 54 tackles and four interceptions as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Kamal Hadden** | CB | 6-1 | 188 | ★★★ | River Rouge, MI | Independence CC (KS) |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 32 junior college player and No. 5 junior college cornerback nationally and No. 11 junior college player in Kansas… Had 21 tackles, eight passes broken up, one interception and three fumbles caused in 2019. | | | | | | |
| **Ahmari Harvey** | S | 6-0 | 172 | ★★★★ | Tallahassee, FL | Florida State University School |
| Ranked No. 14 safety nationally and No. 30 player in Florida by 247Sports.com… As a senior, helped team to 10-1 record… Had 40 receptions for 642 yards and seven touchdowns as a junior… Had 94 tackles and six interceptions, including three returned for touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Jarquez Hunter** | RB | 5-10 | 190 | ★★★ | Philadelphia, MS | Neshoba Central |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 36 running back nationally and No. 12 player in Mississippi… Rushed for at least 1,600 yards and 22 touchdowns in each of his last three high school seasons. | | | | | | |
| **Lee Hunter** | DT | 6-4 | 321 | ★★★★ | Eight Mile | Blount |
| Ranked No. 80 player and No. 6 defensive tackle nationally and No. 5 player in Alabama by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had 54 tackles, including 20 tackles for loss, and 4.5 quarterback sacks… Had nine receptions for 149 yards and one touchdown… Also scored a rushing touchdown… Had 77 tackles, including 23 tackles for loss as a junior. | | | | | | |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Landen King** | TE | 6-5 | 214 | ★★★ | Beaumont, TX | Atascocita |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 27 tight end nationally and No. 86 player in Texas… Had 39 receptions for 471 yards and five touchdowns as a senior… As a junior, had 53 receptions for 853 yards and nine touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Garner Langlo** | OT | 6-6 | 277 | ★★★ | Inverness, FL | Trinity Catholic |
| Ranked No. 33 offensive guard nationally and No. 86 player in Florida by 247Sports.com… As a senior, helped team to 11-1 record and state semifinals. | | | | | | |
| **Andrew (Eku) Leota** | DE | 6-4 | 250 | ★★★ | Asheville, NC | Northwestern |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 36 weakside defensive end nationally and No. 24 player in North Carolina… Had 13 tackles and four quarterback sacks in eight games for Northwestern in 2020… Has three years of eligibility remaining. | | | | | | |
| **Ian Mathews** | DL | 6-5 | 270 | ★★★ | Columbus, GA | Pacelli |
| Ranked No. 42 defensive tackle nationally and No. 57 player in Georgia by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had 61 tackles, including 18.5 tackles for loss, seven quarterback sacks, two passes broken up, four quarterback pressures, and two fumbles caused… Scored one receiving touchdown… Had 43 tackles, including five tackles for loss, and three fumbles recovered as a junior… Scored three receiving touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Dreshun Miller** | CB | 6-1 | 192 | ★★★★ | Atlanta, GA | West Virginia |
| Had 31 tackles, one interception and eight passes broken up for Mountaineers in 2020… Has two years of eligibility remaining. | | | | | | |
| **Tobechi Okoli** | DE | 6-5 | 255 | ★★★ | Kansas City, MO | Lincoln Prep Academy |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 33 strongside defensive end nationally and No. 7 player in Missouri… Had 41.5 tackles, including 18.5 tackles for loss, and seven quarterback sacks as a senior. | | | | | | |
| **Hal Presley** | WR | 6-3 | 197 | ★★★ | Mansfield, TX | Mansfield Summit |
| Ranked No. 63 wide receiver nationally and No. 53 player in Texas by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had 32 receptions for 755 yards and 13 touchdowns… Had 45 receptions for 874 yards and eight touchdowns as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Marquis Robinson** | DT | 6-4 | 300 | ★★★★ | Milton, FL | Milton |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 22 defensive tackle nationally and No. 51 player in Florida… Had 39 tackles, including 10 tackles for loss, three quarterback sacks, and 23 quarterback hurries as a senior… As a junior, had 53 tackles, including 15.5 tackles for loss. | | | | | | |
| **Colby Smith** | OT | 6-7 | 315 | ★★★ | West End, NC | Rockingham County |
| Ranked No. 49 offensive tackle nationally and No. 34 player in North Carolina by 247Sports.com. | | | | | | |
| **Joko Willis** | LB | 6-3 | 215 | ★★★ | LaGrange, GA | Independence CC (KS) |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 23 junior college player and No. 2 junior college inside linebacker nationally and No. 7 junior college player in Kansas… As a high school senior, had 39 receptions for 869 yards and eight touchdowns. | | | | | | |

# PLAYER PROFILE

## New Staff + Johnson = Right Opportunity

In today's college football, a player like Auburn sophomore Ja'Varrius Johnson just needs an opportunity.

After signing with the Tigers in 2019 following an illustrious prep career as an explosive wideout/return man at Hewitt-Trussville High School (87 receptions for 1,683 yards and 15 touchdowns) in Birmingham, Ala., the speedy 5-foot-9, 159-pound sophomore barely saw the playing field in two years under Gus Malzahn.

But instead of losing his cool and leaving for greener pastures via the transfer portal, Johnson made a conscious effort to improve his game while honoring a commitment he gave to Auburn when he signed his LOI three years ago.

"I never considered it (transfer portal)," said Johnson, a Business Marketing major.

"I always took it as, maybe there's something I can improve on and work on. So, I just felt that if I kept working then maybe I would get my chance. I've always felt like I'm a competitor and have never wanted to take the easy way out. I felt like if I entered the portal, I would be doing that."

When Bryan Harsin arrived and Auburn began spring workouts, Johnson made a lasting impression on his new head coach by being a consistent playmaker in practice, whether he was working at receiver or punt returner. It's a big reason why he was the talk of spring ball.

"He's been one of the more consistent players, day in and day out, as far as his execution and preparation," Harsin said during spring practice. "Being able to come off the ball and be an explosive player play after play, the great ones who play that position, at wide receiver, that's what they do."

In Auburn's A-Day Game, Johnson caught two passes for 15 yards. He also added a rush for nine yards — and he's currently on track to play a vital role in Mike Bobo's offense.

WR
Ja'Varrius Johnson
Photo by AP Photo/Butch Dill

But he could also double as threat in the return games due to his game-breaking speed, which is something the Tigers lacked last year.

"I've always loved punt returning," Johnson said. "I like it better than kick return because you get to make a decision — fair catch or not — and your instincts kind of tell you when you have enough space to be able to run or not get killed before catching it."

For more coverage visit lindyssports.com/college-football/sec/auburn

# BEST AND BRIGHTEST

## MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

### RB TANK BIGSBY

The reigning SEC Freshman of the Year could be in line for a monster season operating in a "multiple" pro-style scheme, which has always been friendly to tailbacks. … Bigsby should also benefit from operating behind an experienced line and a group of impressive tight ends that are expected to help out more in the run game. … Posted four 100-yard rushing games, including 192 against Mississippi State to end the season.

## EMERGING STAR

### DE COLBY WOODEN

As a redshirt freshman in 2020, Wooden earned a starting role on Auburn's defensive line and was the unit's top player. … Blessed with great size (6-5, 278) and athleticism, Wooden tied for the team lead in sacks (four) and led the team in quarterback hurries (six). … If he adds more strength, Wooden could become a force. … Selected to the SEC All-Freshman team. … Finished with 9.5 tackles for loss, including two each against Arkansas and South Carolina.

## TOP NEWCOMER

### WR JA'VARRIUS JOHNSON

Johnson turned heads this spring after playing in one game in 2020. He's in line to be the team's starting slot receiver and is an option in the return game. … Johnson isn't big (5-10, 159), but he's a burner who could develop into a reliable underneath and downfield threat in the team's new offensive system.

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# FLORIDA GATORS

For more coverage of the Gators, visit florida.247Sports.com

**CO-OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS:** Billy Gonzales, John Hevesy **DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Todd Grantham **STADIUM:** Ben Hill Griffin: 91,916

## A DIFFERENT LOOK ON OFFENSE (AND HOPEFULLY ON DEFENSE, TOO)

The 2020 season will go down as one of the biggest "what ifs?" in Florida Gators football history.

What if Malik Davis hadn't fumbled in the fourth quarter against Texas A&M?

What if Marco Wilson hadn't extended a game-winning drive for LSU by throwing a cleat after a third-down stop?

What if the helmet-to-helmet hit had been called when Trey Dean was waylaid after his interception against Alabama in the SEC Championship Game?

If even one of those hypotheticals had panned out differently, Florida might — probably would have? — become a playoff contender.

But they didn't. So, after rising as high as No. 3 the Gators wound up No. 13 in the final AP poll.

And now they face a different challenge: Proving they can continue playing at the level required to compete for championships.

"I think to build, to become a great program, you have to win and you win on a consistent basis," coach Dan Mullen said. "Last year we got the opportunity to go compete for the SEC championship. It is that consistency — winning on a consistent basis — where we want to be as a program.

"I think we've been able to do that and need to continue to do that in the future."

UF will have a different look in the fall. An offense that relied heavily on the nation's best passing game led by Kyle Trask, Kadarius Toney and Kyle Pitts will shift to a ground-and-pound approach keyed around dual-threat quarterback Emory Jones.

Florida is deep at running back, with no shortage of options. But will the Gators have the weapons outside to complement him?

Mullen suggests that it is up to the coaching staff to build around Jones' skill set.

As defensive end Zachary Carter said, "Emory, he brings a different flavor to the offense — athletic guy, he makes you miss."

Meanwhile, the defense must fix a historically bad unit. The secondary was the chief culprit in 2020, so Mullen fired both assistant coaches in the back end. The Gators hope to play more press man coverage in the fall but will have to do so relying on a very, very young secondary. Junior cornerback Kaiir Elam is the lone major contributor returning in the back end.

Florida hopes an improved, veteran defensive line can help apply more heat on opposing quarterbacks.

The reality is that the pressure falls squarely on the Gators in Mullen's fourth season. Will Florida remain competitive at a high enough level to challenge for the East Division crown and SEC championship?

Or was 2020 simply an excellent opportunity wasted?

### OFFENSE

Florida led the nation in passing in 2020 at 378.6 yards a game behind a record-setting season from long-time backup turned Heisman Trophy finalist Kyle Trask. Now Trask is gone to the NFL and the Gators will turn to another backup to take over for him.

This one, though, hasn't been a career backup. Emory Jones was tabbed as Mullen's quarterback of the future when he signed with Florida in the 2018 recruiting class.

Through a long wait, he didn't transfer. Now he's the guy.

"I'll just say I have a lot of responsibility," Jones said. " I mean I've been waiting for this time right here. It definitely was tough, but just going in (games) made me confident. So I've just been working my tail off every year just trying to get better. That's all I'm focused on."

Mullen has groomed Jones and gradually cultivated his confidence. The Gators will try to build an offense around the electric dual-threat quarterback. Expect Florida to be much more run-oriented, relying on Dameon Pierce and a strong stable of backs, which now includes Clemson transfer Demarkcus Bowman, formerly a five-star prospect in the 2020 class. He went through spring ball with the Gators.

"With the addition of Emory in a start-

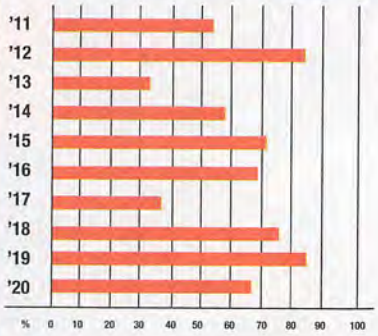
## SCHEDULE

| Date | Opponent | '20 Record |
|---|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | FLORIDA ATLANTIC | 5-4 |
| Sept. 11 | at South Florida | 1-8 |
| Sept. 18 | ALABAMA | 13-0 |
| Sept. 25 | TENNESSEE | 3-7 |
| Oct. 2 | at Kentucky | 5-6 |
| Oct. 9 | VANDERBILT | 0-9 |
| Oct. 16 | at LSU | 5-5 |
| Oct. 30 | vs. Georgia (Jacksonville, FL) | 8-2 |
| Nov. 6 | at South Carolina | 2-8 |
| Nov. 13 | SAMFORD | 4-3 |
| Nov. 20 | at Missouri | 5-5 |
| Nov. 27 | FLORIDA STATE | 3-6 |

## RESULTS

| | 8-4, 8-2 | |
|---|---|---|
| W | at Ole Miss | 51-35 |
| W | SOUTH CAROLINA | 38-24 |
| L | at Texas A&M | 38-41 |
| W | MISOURI | 41-17 |
| W | vs. Georgia (Jacksonville, FL) | 44-28 |
| W | ARKANSAS | 63-35 |
| W | at Vanderbilt | 38-17 |
| W | KENTUCKY | 34-10 |
| W | at Tennessee | 31-19 |
| L | LSU | 34-37 |
| | **SEC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME** | |
| L | vs. Alabama (Atlanta, GA) | 46-52 |
| | **COTTON BOWL** | |
| L | vs. Oklahoma (Arlington, TX) | 20-55 |

## 10-YEAR WINNING TREND



## AT A GLANCE

**LOCATION:**
Gainesville, Fla.

**2020:**
8-4 overall, 8-2 SEC (1st, East)

**COACH:**
Dan Mullen — At Florida: 29-9, 3 years; overall: 98-55, 12 years

**RETURNING STARTERS:**
9; 4 offense, 5 defense

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:**
QB Emory Jones, WR Jacob Copeland, OL Stewart Reese, DE Zachary Carter, DE Brenton Cox, LB Ventrell Miller, LB Mohamoud Diabate, CB Kaiir Elam

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:**
Assuming the offensive line can take a step forward in run blocking, the Gators should be pretty good on the ground. A strong stable of backs and a pair of dual-threat quarterbacks should shift the offense's focus in 2021.

**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:**
Florida hopes to see some addition by subtraction after losing several veterans from a disconnected secondary, but the Gators will be young in the back end. Offensively, the O-line remains a potential issue.

**KEY LOSSES:**
QB Kyle Trask, WR Kadarius Toney, WR Trevon Grimes, TE Kyle Pitts, DT Tedarrell Slaton, S Shawn Davis, K Evan McPherson

**OVERVIEW:**
With a schedule that features Alabama early and a real rebuild on offense, Mullen will have to do some of his best work to keep Florida in SEC title contention in 2021. Realistically, the Gators might have too much to fix on defense and too many new parts on offense to remain atop the division.

**KEY NUMBER:**
**44-56** That was roughly Florida's run-pass balance on offense in 2020. Expect to see that ratio flip in 2021 as UF leans more on the run.

DE
Kaiir
ELAM
Photo by AP Photo/John Raoux

LB

**Brenton Cox Jr.**

Photo by Michael Wade

## SCOUTING REPORT: Offense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | Emory Jones | Jr. | Flipped commitment to Florida from Ohio State late in 2018. | Anthony Richardson, Fr. |
| **RB** | **Dameon Pierce*** | Sr. | Powerful senior can squat more than 600 pounds. | Malik Davis, Sr. |
| WR | Jacob Copeland | Jr. | Leading returning receiver totaled 435 yards last season. | Xzavier Henderson, So. |
| WR | Justin Shorter | Jr. | Former five-star prospect transferred from Penn State in 2020. | Ja'Quavion Fraziars, So. |
| WR | Trent Whittemore | So. | Local high school prospect played both basketball and football. | Rick Wells, Sr. |
| TE | Kemore Gamble | Sr. | Scored three touchdowns in November with Kyle Pitts sidelined. | Keon Zipperer, Jr. |
| **LT** | **Richard Gouraige*** | Jr. | Finally making move to tackle after spending three years inside. | William Harrod, So. |
| LG | Ethan White | Jr. | Was slated to start at center in 2020 before knee injury in camp. | Griffin McDowell, Jr. |
| **C** | **Stewart Reese*** | Sr. | Started 11 games at right guard after transferring from MSU. | Kingsley Eguakun, So. |
| RG | Joshua Braun | So. | Played extensively as a backup guard as true freshman in 2020. | Richard Leonard, Fr. |
| **RT** | **Jean Delance*** | Sr. | Former Texas transfer has started 25 games the last two years. | Michael Tarquin, So. |
| K | Jace Christmann | Sr. | Transferred from Mississippi State (219 career points). | Chris Howard, Sr. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

## SCOUTING REPORT: Defense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **DE** | **Zachary Carter*** | Sr. | Led team in sacks (5.0) and tackles for loss (9.5) last year. | Khris Bogle, Jr. |
| NT | Antonio Shelton | Sr. | Honorable-mention All-Big Ten transfer from Penn State. | Jalen Lee, So. |
| DT | Daquan Newkirk | Sr. | Auburn transfer's career was set back by two Achilles tears. | Gervon Dexter, So. |
| **LB** | **Brenton Cox*** | Jr. | Tied for team lead in tackles for loss (9.5) in first year eligible. | Jeremiah Moon, Sr. |
| **LB** | **Ventrell Miller*** | Sr. | Led the Gators in tackles with 88 stops on the season. | Ty'Ron Hopper, So. |
| **LB** | **Mohamoud Diabate*** | Jr. | Spent 2020 learning new position after playing end in 2019. | Amari Burney, Sr. |
| **CB** | **Kaiir Elam*** | Jr. | Big, physical cornerback seen as potential first-round NFL pick. | Ethan Pouncey, Fr. |
| CB | Jaydon Hill | Jr. | Junior will have heavy competition for his starting spot. | Avery Helm, Fr. |
| NB | Tre'Vez Johnson | So. | Appeared in all 12 games at nickel as a true freshman. | Kamar Wilcoxson, Fr. |
| SS | Trey Dean | Sr. | Played corner, nickel and is now settling in at safety. | Mordecai McDaniel, So. |
| FS | Rashad Torrence II | So. | Played in nine games as a true freshman, starting three. | Donovan McMillon, Fr. |
| P | Jeremy Crawshaw | Fr. | Redshirt freshman punter recruited from Australia. | Jacob Watkins, Sr. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

ing role this year, there's obviously more options to run the ball," Pierce said. "We're going to work with that."

There's a lot to replace at receiver, which also steers UF to the ground game. Juniors Jacob Copeland and Justin Shorter will be expected to pick up the slack left by the departures of star tight end Kyle Pitts and human joystick Kadarius Toney (both first-round draft picks), and Florida will also need some first- and second-year wideouts to emerge.

Mullen has typically relied on a strong power run game when he has a dual-threat quarterback, allowing the threat of the quarterback run to suck defenders inside and create one-on-one matchups for receivers outside.

How well Florida fares in that regard will depend on an offensive line that has been shaky run-blocking in the past two years but, should be much beefier on the interior with the three expected starters topping the scales at more than 345 pounds each.

"Interior-wise walking out there if you have Stewart (Reese) at center, Ethan (White) at guard and Josh (Braun) at guard, it's 353, 350, 354 — so pretty big, which I think is part of the whole deal to running the ball and moving those inside guys to run downhill," offensive line coach John Hevesy said. "There's some mass in there to move guys, to learn to be physical all the time."

## DEFENSE

If not for a historically bad year on defense in 2020, the Gators might have been able to capitalize on a record-setting year on offense. Florida gave up more points per game than it had in a century, as UF fans grew increasingly irate at blown coverages, poor third-down defense and sloppy play as the season wore on.

Yet, Mullen opted to retain defensive coordinator Todd Grantham for a fourth year. Instead, Mullen replaced both assistant coaches in the secondary as Florida aims to play more press man coverage. Mullen and players have backed Grantham, who is known for being an aggressive defensive play-caller.

"I mean, that's on us. It's not really coaches," linebacker Amari Burney said. "He put us in position. We have to make the plays. We can't have so many mistakes."

Florida returns a lot up front, though. The return of edge defenders Zachary Carter and Brenton Cox provides a solid pair of bookends, and Florida added Penn State graduate transfer Antonio Shelton and Auburn graduate transfer Daquan Newkirk on the interior to complement them. The Gators should be much stouter up front.

Shelton and Newkirk were immediately impressive in the spring. As Burney said, "they're keeping us clean as can be."

He added: "We can flow over the top better, get in our gaps better. When they're

## TOP 5 NFL PROSPECTS

**1. Kaiir Elam** CB 6-2 195 4.48 Jr.

Entering his third season as a starter in Gainesville, Elam possesses tremendous length and athleticism. He breaks extremely well due to his anticipation and nose for the football. In addition, Elam possesses outstanding footwork and hips, allowing him to have the fluidity to keep up with shifty downfield targets and stay tight throughout a variety of moves. It's impressive how well he can stick with wide receivers, and Elam owns the strength to key in on tight ends or bigger red zone threats.

In 25 career games, Elam has accumulated 20 passes defended, five interceptions and 50 tackles. Last season, he totaled 39 tackles, 11 passes defended and two interceptions, while coming up big in a loss to Alabama in the SEC Championship Game, making several big plays. Blessed with ideal size, speed and instincts, Elam has the make-up of a potential first-round pick.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2. Brenton Cox Jr.** | OLB | 6-4 | 252 | 4.73 | Jr. |
| **3. Trey Dean III** | S | 6-3 | 205 | 4.53 | Sr. |
| **4. Zachary Carter** | DE | 6-4 | 277 | 4.88 | Sr. |
| **5. Emory Jones** | QB | 6-2 | 210 | 5.04 | Jr. |

— Ric Serritella, NFL Draft Bible

getting double-teamed, we get to flow over. They come off the double team, that's an easy tackle for a loss for them."

The issues for Florida in the secondary are less easily solved. A handful of veterans departed via the transfer portal, which the Gators like to think could lead to addition by subtraction. In any case, these Gators are extremely young. Junior cornerback Kaiir Elam is the lone major contributor returning, while senior safety Trey Dean has bounced around the secondary throughout his career.

Still, the Gators say they can fix what ailed the defense a year ago, namely lack of urgency and poor communication.

"All those things are incredibly fixable," linebacker Mohamoud Diabate said. "Coach Grantham, Coach Mullen and the rest of the staff are working extremely hard to make sure we can fix those issues and I have a great deal of confidence that we're going to get that done."

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Florida has to replace virtually all of its specialists. Kicker Evan McPherson, the third-most accurate kicker in school history, left early for the NFL Draft. Starting punter Jacob Finn transferred to Virginia, and return man Kadarius Toney became a first-round NFL Draft pick.

The Gators are counting on Mississippi State transfer Jace Christmann (8-of-10 on field goal attempts in 2019) to take over at kicker, while Australian Jeremy Crawshaw figures to be the new punter.

Meanwhile, Florida will likely experiment with a handful of skill players, including running back Nay'Quan Wright and receiver Xzavier Henderson, on returns.

## SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

The 2021 schedule is not the most difficult Florida has faced, but any time Alabama appears on the schedule from the opposite division there's not a lot of margin for error in conference play.

Florida and Alabama meet in Week 3, which might be a good time to catch the Tide, which has a younger lineup than in recent years — but then again, the Gators have their own rebuild going on, too.

The other swing spots on the schedule comes in mid-to-late October, when Florida will travel to LSU on Oct. 16, take a week off and then take on rival Georgia in Jacksonville on Oct. 30. In order to be competitive in the SEC East, UF needs to win at least one of those three marquee matchups, if not two.

The non-conference is very navigable, with a road trip to USF and home games against Florida Atlantic, Florida State and Samford.

— Thomas Goldkamp

RB
**Dameon Pierce**
Photo by Freddie Beckwith / Marinmedia / CSM via ZUMA Wire via AP Images

### 2018 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 35.0 | 22 |
| Rushing | 213.2 | 27 |
| Passing | 213.5 | 82 |
| Total | 426.7 | 42 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 20.0 | 20 |
| Rushing | 162.5 | 65 |
| Passing | 180.8 | 13 |
| Total | 343.3 | 28 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 12 | + 0.92 | T-7 |

### 2019 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 33.2 | T-28 |
| Rushing | 129.8 | 107 |
| Passing | 300.8 | 16 |
| Total | 430.5 | 45 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 15.5 | 7 |
| Rushing | 102.8 | 8 |
| Passing | 202.1 | 32 |
| Total | 304.8 | 9 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 5 | +0.38 | T-33 |

### 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 39.8 | 13 |
| Rushing | 131.2 | 96 |
| Passing | 378.6 | 1 |
| Total | 509.8 | 9 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 30.8 | 74 |
| Rushing | 170.5 | 71 |
| Passing | 257.5 | 100 |
| Total | 428.0 | 83 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 3 | - 0.25 | 81 |

# NOTEBOOK

When Florida's defense was continually gashed last season, allowing 30.8 points a game — the most for the program since 1917 — coach **Dan Mullen** and defensive coordinator **Todd Grantham** absorbed increasing criticism.

When asked when he'd consider making a change, Mullen reiterated his belief in Grantham. After all, a year earlier the veteran coordinator had directed a defense that allowed just 15.5 points a game.

"We played pretty good defense for a good part of the year," Mullen said. "We made some critical mistakes. We'll watch it and as you continue to evaluate, you evaluate the whole picture and whole package of it all. We'll do that. I'm pretty confident with Todd."

Instead of sacking Grantham, Mullen replaced two coaches in the defensive backfield, bringing in **Wesley McGriff** from Auburn as secondary coach, and **Jules Montinar** from USF as cornerbacks coach.

• Florida lost three senior defensive tackles and had recruiting class gaps, so Mullen and his staff had to hit the transfer portal. Mullen did well there, snagging Penn State graduate transfer **Antonio Shelton** and Auburn graduate transfer **Daquan Newkirk**. Both are expected to start.

"I think they bring a sense of maturity and they show the younger guys how to work," Mullen said.

"Both of those guys have brought an unbelievable attitude within the team and with their work ethic, how they show up, how they prepare. Great maturity, with a great positive attitude, is a huge plus for our defensive line and really huge for our defense and team as a whole."

• Florida also added former five-star prospect **Demarkcus Bowman** as a transfer from Clemson. Bowman missed most of spring with a minor injury but is expected to make a significant impact in the fall.

Senior starter **Dameon Pierce** seems to embody the approach that Mullen is trying to instill.

"For a guy like Bowman in his first year here, how can I help him get more comfortable?" Pierce said. "I have to make sure that he's OK. If he ain't set, that's a reflection on me. That means that's poor leadership on my end."

## OPPOSING COACHES VIEW

• "I don't think Florida will be all that because they lost three damn good offensive players who will be good in the NFL: Kyle Pitts, Kyle Trask and Kadarius Toney. …

• "Dan Mullen is one of the brightest offensive minds in college football. What he does is simple but he presents issues for a defense. He's one of the top 2-3 quarterback developers in the country. He's coached against Nick Saban and Kirby Smart for a dozen years. He has a system to move the ball and beat Alabama and Georgia. …

• "His Achilles' heel is his defense. I was shocked he didn't get rid of (DC) Todd Grantham. They played poorly on defense in the big games. And they had plenty of players on defense. Dan needs to pick up his recruiting and get a staff that gets big-time talent."

# GATORS SPRING ROSTER

| Quarterback | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 Carlos Del Rio-Wilson | QB | 6-2 | 238 | Fr. | Atlanta, GA |
| 5 Emory Jones | QB | 6-2 | 210 | Jr. | LaGrange, GA |
| 11 Jalen Kitna | QB | 6-5 | 198 | Fr. | Tacoma, WA |
| 2 Anthony Richardson | QB | 6-4 | 232 | Fr. | Gainesville |
| **Running Back** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 23 Demarkcus Bowman | RB | 5-10 | 187 | Fr. | Lakeland |
| 20 Malik Davis | RB | 5-10 | 198 | Sr. | Tampa |
| 38 Carlson Joseph | RB | 5-10 | 191 | Fr. | Pompano Beach |
| 21 Lorenzo Lingard | RB | 6-0 | 206 | Jr. | Orange City |
| 27 Dameon Pierce | RB | 5-10 | 212 | Sr. | Bainbridge, GA |
| 6 Nay'Quan Wright | RB | 5-9 | 197 | So. | Miami Gardens |
| **Wide Receivers** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 15 Jacob Copeland | WR | 6-0 | 204 | Jr. | Pensacola |
| 0 Ja'Quavion Fraziars | WR | 6-3 | 215 | So. | Dunnellon |
| 3 Xzavier Henderson | WR | 6-3 | 196 | So. | Miami |
| 86 Jordan Pouncey | WR | 6-1 | 212 | Sr. | Winter Park |
| 81 Daejon Reynolds | WR | 6-2 | 201 | Fr. | Springfield, IL |
| 89 Justin Shorter | WR | 6-5 | 227 | Jr. | Monmouth Junction, NJ |
| 12 Rick Wells | WR | 6-1 | 204 | Sr. | Jacksonville |
| 82 Ja'Markis Weston | WR | 6-3 | 212 | So. | Clewiston |
| 80 Trent Whittemore | WR | 6-4 | 213 | So. | Gainesville |
| **Tight Ends** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 84 Nick Elksnis | TE | 6-6 | 237 | Fr. | Jacksonville |
| 88 Kemore Gamble | TE | 6-4 | 252 | Sr. | Miami |
| 87 Jonathan Odom | TE | 6-6 | 240 | Fr. | Tampa |
| 9 Keon Zipperer | TE | 6-3 | 240 | Jr. | Lakeland |
| **Offensive Lineman** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 72 Josh Braun | OL | 6-6 | 352 | So. | Live Oak |
| 56 Jean Delance | OL | 6-5 | 307 | Sr. | Mesquite, TX |
| 65 Kingsley Eguakun | OL | 6-4 | 315 | So. | Jacksonville |
| 76 Richard Gouraige | OL | 6-5 | 313 | Jr. | Tampa |
| 74 Will Harrod | OL | 6-5 | 333 | So. | Clinton, MD |
| 55 Hayden Knighton | OL | 6-2 | 285 | So. | Fort Myers |
| 67 Richie Leonard | OL | 6-2 | 335 | Fr. | Cocoa |
| 62 Griffin McDowell | OL | 6-4 | 303 | Jr. | Leesburg, GA |
| 54 Gerald Mincey | OL | 6-6 | 335 | Fr. | Fort Lauderdale |
| 75 T.J. Moore | OL | 6-5 | 309 | Sr. | Charlotte, NC |
| 73 Mark Pitts | OL | 6-6 | 320 | Fr. | Gainesville |
| 51 Stewart Reese | OL | 6-6 | 354 | Gr. | Fort Pierce |
| 64 Riley Simonds | OL | 6-3 | 305 | So. | Buford, GA |
| 70 Michael Tarquin | OL | 6-5 | 306 | So. | Ocala |
| 77 Ethan White | OL | 6-5 | 346 | Jr. | Clearwater |
| **Defensive Lineman** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 95 Lucas Alonso | DL | 6-2 | 272 | Fr. | Miami |
| 91 Justus Boone | DL | 6-4 | 265 | Fr. | Sumter, SC |
| 6 Zachary Carter | DL | 6-4 | 277 | Sr. | Tampa |
| 9 Gervon Dexter | DL | 6-6 | 308 | So. | Lake Wales |
| 54 Lamar Goods | DL | 6-2 | 335 | Fr. | Fort McMurray, CAN |
| 66 Jaelin Humphries | DL | 6-3 | 325 | So. | Lawrenceville, GA |
| 18 Dante Lang | DL | 6-5 | 291 | Jr. | Boca Raton |
| 92 Jalen Lee | DL | 6-2 | 313 | So. | Watson, LA |
| 44 Daquan Newkirk | DL | 6-3 | 318 | Sr. | Orlando |
| 55 Antonio Shelton | DL | 6-3 | 318 | Sr. | Columbus, OH |
| 90 Chris Thomas Jr. | DL | 6-5 | 314 | Fr. | Tallahassee |
| 33 Princely Umanmielen | DL | 6-4 | 245 | So. | Manor, TX |
| 21 Desmond Watson | DL | 6-5 | 432 | Fr. | Plant City |

| Linebackers | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 Khris Bogle | OLB | 6-4 | 234 | Jr. | Fort Lauderdale |
| 36 Chief Borders | LB | 6-4 | 240 | Fr. | Chicago, IL |
| 34 Lacedrick Brunson | LB | 6-2 | 234 | Sr. | Miami |
| 30 Amari Burney | LB | 6-2 | 235 | Sr. | St. Petersburg |
| 10 Andrew Chatfield Jr. | OLB | 6-2 | 251 | Jr. | Plantation |
| 1 Brenton Cox Jr. | OLB | 6-4 | 252 | Jr. | Stockbridge, GA |
| 11 Mohamoud Diabate | LB | 6-3 | 221 | Jr. | Auburn, AL |
| 28 Ty'Ron Hopper | LB | 6-2 | 221 | So. | Alpharetta, GA |
| 48 Noah Keeter | OLB | 6-5 | 229 | So. | Gainesville |
| 93 Dylan Meeks | OLB | 6-2 | 236 | Sr. | Orlando |
| 51 Ventrell Miller | LB | 6-1 | 225 | Sr. | Lakeland |
| 7 Jeremiah Moon | OLB | 6-5 | 245 | Sr. | Hoover, AL |
| 52 Antwaun Powell | OLB | 6-2 | 245 | Fr. | Portsmouth, VA |
| 4 David Reese | OLB | 6-2 | 234 | Jr. | Fort Pierce |
| 99 Lloyd Summerall III | OLB | 6-5 | 240 | So. | Lakeland |
| 15 Derek Wingo | LB | 6-1 | 221 | So. | Fort Lauderdale |
| **Defensive Backs** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 20 Corey Collier Jr. | S | 6-1 | 172 | Fr. | Miami |
| 0 Trey Dean III | S | 6-3 | 205 | Sr. | Hampton, GA |
| 5 Kaiir Elam | CB | 6-2 | 195 | Jr. | Riviera Beach |
| 39 Fenley Graham | S | 5-9 | 167 | Fr. | Lakeland |
| 24 Avery Helm | CB | 6-1 | 174 | Fr. | Missouri City, TX |
| 23 Jaydon Hill | CB | 6-0 | 190 | Jr. | Huntsville, AL |
| 16 Tre'Vez Johnson | S | 5-11 | 188 | So. | Jacksonville |
| 3 Jason Marshall Jr. | CB | 6-0 | 191 | Fr. | Miami |
| 32 Mordecai McDaniel | S | 6-1 | 192 | So. | Washington, DC |
| 13 Donovan McMillon | S | 6-1 | 197 | Fr. | McMurray |
| 37 Patrick Moorer | CB | 6-1 | 166 | Sr. | Lutz |
| 25 Ethan Pouncey | CB | 6-1 | 165 | Fr. | Winter Park |
| 27 Jahari Rogers | CB | 5-11 | 184 | Fr. | Arlington, TX |
| 22 Rashad Torrence II | S | 6-0 | 197 | So. | College Park, GA |
| 26 Kamar Wilcoxson | S | 6-1 | 186 | Fr. | Lithonia, GA |
| 31 Jordan Young | CB | 6-0 | 189 | Fr. | Tampa |
| **Athletes** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 18 Jack Anders | ATH | 6-2 | 202 | So. | Germantown, MD |
| 44 Brandon Becar | ATH | 6-2 | 242 | Sr. | Green Cove Springs |
| 46 John Brady | ATH | 5-11 | 183 | So. | Tallahassee |
| 33 Daniel Cross | ATH | 6-0 | 172 | Jr. | Orlando |
| 57 Coleman Crozier | ATH | 5-11 | 203 | Jr. | Plantation |
| 31 Chase DeMichele | ATH | 6-0 | 188 | Jr. | Gainesville |
| 29 Khamal Ellison | ATH | 5-9 | 199 | Sr. | Miami |
| 13 Kyle Engel | ATH | 6-0 | 187 | So. | Fort Lauderdale |
| 96 Travis Freeman | ATH | 5-11 | 198 | So. | Lakewood Ranch |
| 17 Kahleil Jackson | ATH | 6-3 | 209 | Fr. | Hawthorne |
| 85 Kevin Johnson | ATH | 5-10 | 214 | Jr. | Columbus, NJ |
| 41 Alex McCourt | ATH | - | | Jr. | Parkland |
| 47 Justin Pelic | ATH | 5-11 | 214 | So. | Mount Pleasant, SC |
| 49 Preston Pelski | ATH | - | | Jr. | Ocala |
| 29 Isaac Ricks | ATH | 5-8 | 227 | Sr. | Jacksonville |
| 35 William Sawyer | ATH | 6-1 | 185 | So. | Gainesville |
| 43 Jake Sheets | ATH | - | | Fr. | Punta Gorda |
| 83 Joshua Tse | ATH | 5-9 | 182 | Sr. | Port Orange |
| 37 Tyler Waxman | ATH | 5-9 | 171 | So. | Pembroke Pines |
| 53 Chase Whitfield | ATH | 6-0 | 243 | So. | Saint Cloud |
| **Specialist** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 26 Jeremy Crawshaw | P | 6-4 | 196 | Fr. | New South Wales, AUS |
| 71 Chris Howard | K | 6-1 | 202 | Sr. | Ponte Vedra Beach |
| 45 Marco Ortiz | LS | 6-4 | 234 | Jr. | Richmond, VA |
| 40 Jacob Watkins | P | 6-3 | 190 | Sr. | Gainesville |

# INDIVIDUAL STATS

## PASSING

| NAME | GP | Effic | Cmp | Att | Int | Pct | Yards | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K. Trask | 12 | 180.0 | 301 | 437 | 8 | 68.9 | 4283 | 43 | 71 | 356.9 |
| E. Jones | 9 | 128.6 | 18 | 32 | 1 | 56.3 | 221 | 2 | 30 | 24.6 |

## RECEIVING

| RECEIVING | GP | No. | Yards | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K. Toney | 11 | 70 | 984 | 14.1 | 10 | 57 | 89.5 |
| K. Pitts | 8 | 43 | 770 | 17.9 | 12 | 71 | 96.3 |
| T. Grimes | 11 | 38 | 589 | 15.5 | 9 | 50 | 53.6 |

## RUSHING

| RUSHING | GP | Att. | Gain | Loss | Net | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| D. Pierce | 12 | 106 | 511 | 8 | 503 | 4.7 | 4 | 38 | 41.9 |
| M. Davis | 12 | 66 | 320 | 10 | 310 | 4.7 | 0 | 39 | 25.8 |
| E. Jones | 9 | 32 | 220 | 3 | 217 | 6.8 | 2 | 22 | 24.1 |

## DEF. LEADERS

Tackles: V. Miller 88, M. Diabate 69, D. Stiner 62
Tackles for loss: B. Cox 9.5, Z. Carter 9.5, V. Miller 7.5
Sacks: Z. Carter 5, B. Cox Jr. 4, K. Bogle 4
Interceptions: S. Davis 2, K. Elam 2, five tied with 1

# 247SPORTS GATORS RECRUITING 2021

## 3 NEWCOMERS OF IMPACT

### Jason Marshall

The prize of the Florida Gators 2021 recruiting class, and No. 2 ranked cornerback according to the 247Sports Composite. Florida has Kaiir Elam back as last year's starter, but past him, there are a ton of young and unproven names on UF's roster. Marshall was able to go through spring ball and will press for early playing time with his physicality and ball skills.

### Diwun Black

The Gators signed Black in the 2019 recruiting class, but he had to take the junior college route. With Black now finished with his AA degree, he is expected to be in Gainesville this summer. He's ranked as the No. 1 junior college player and brings athleticism to a defense that struggled in 2020, especially at the linebacker position.

### Tyreak Sapp

The Gators have needed to sign many defensive linemen over the last few cycles and inked a 247Sports Composite Top100 player in Sapp. The Gators have a solid defensive front heading into the 2021 season but will need depth in the trenches playing in the SEC. Sapp comes from one of the top high schools in the country and is expected to be thrown into the fire early.

## SLEEPER

### Desmond Watson

Watson will need to reshape his body, but the Gators don't have anyone with his size on the roster. The Gators were pushed around along their defensive line in 2020. He moves well for a player his size and the Florida staff should be able to find a use for him as he continues to cut weight off the 400-plus pound frame he entered the program with this past spring.

## 2022 NEEDS

The Gators have needs to fill along the offensive line and at the wide receiver position in the 2022 cycle. The Gators need to get better at the offensive tackle position, and the way to do that will be to hit the recruiting trail and develop players. Florida has graduated a ton of productive wideouts these last few seasons, and after inking only two at the position in the 2021 cycle, that need will carry over to 2022.

— By Blake Alderman, Swamp247.com

## 247SPORTS COMPOSITE

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 12 | 12 | 0 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Committments | 26 |
| Average Stars | 3.62 |
| Total Stars | 94 |
| National Rank: 12 | SEC: 5 |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Austin Barber** | OL | 6-6 | 290 | ✪✪✪ | Jacksonville | Trinity Christian Academy |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 47 offensive tackle nationally and No. 80 player in Florida… Helped team to state championship as a senior. | | | | | | |
| **Diwun Black** | ATH | 6-4 | 225 | ✪✪✪✪ | Forest, MS | Mississippi Gulf Coast CC |
| Ranked No. 1 junior college player and No. 1 junior college outside linebacker nationally and No. 1 junior college player in Mississippi by 247Sports.com… Helped team to 2019 NJCAA National Championship… Had 46 tackles, including 8.5 tackles for loss, one interception and five passes broken up… In first three high school seasons, had 225 tackles, including 15 tackles for loss and 18 interceptions… Had 24 receptions for 369 yards and five touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Justus Boone** | DL | 6-4 | 265 | ✪✪✪✪ | Sumter, SC | Sumter High |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 21 strongside defensive end nationally and No. 2 player in South Carolina… Had 96 tackles, including 26.5 tackles for loss, and 12 quarterback sacks in 18 games… As a senior, helped team to 8-0 start and Lower State championship game. | | | | | | |
| **Chief Borders** | ATH | 6-5 | 242 | ✪✪✪✪ | Chicago, IL | Heard County |
| Ranked No. 20 outside linebacker nationally and No. 26 player in Illinois by 247Sports.com… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game. | | | | | | |
| **Demarkcus Bowman** | RB | 5-10 | 187 | ✪✪✪✪✪ | Lakeland | Clemson |
| Played in first two games of 2020 season and had 32 yards rushing on nine carries. | | | | | | |
| **Marcus Burke** | WR | 6-3 | 180 | ✪✪✪✪ | Jacksonville | Trinity Christian Academy |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 33 wide receiver nationally and No. 28 player in Florida… Had 58 receptions for 1,201 yards and 11 touchdowns in 21 games, averaging 20.7 yards per reception. | | | | | | |
| **Corey Collier, Jr.** | DB | 6-1 | 172 | ✪✪✪✪ | Perrine | Miami Palmetto |
| Ranked No. 6 safety nationally and No. 17 player in Florida by 247Sports.com… Had 52 tackles, 13 passes broken up and four interceptions as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Carlos Del Rio-Wilson** | QB | 6-2 | 238 | ✪✪✪✪ | Atlanta, GA | Cartersville |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 16 quarterback nationally and No. 14 player in Georgia. | | | | | | |
| **Nick Elksnis** | TE | 6-6 | 237 | ✪✪✪ | Jacksonville | Episcopal High |
| Ranked No. 15 tight end nationally and No. 60 player in Florida by 247Sports.com. | | | | | | |
| **Jalen Kitna** | QB | 6-5 | 198 | ✪✪✪ | Tacoma, WA | Burleson |
| 247Sports rated No. 31 pro-style quarterback nationally. | | | | | | |
| **Jason Marshall, Jr.** | DB | 6-1 | 191 | ✪✪✪✪✪ | Miami | Miami Palmetto |
| Ranked No. 28 player and No. 2 cornerback nationally and No. 9 player in Florida by 247Sports.com. | | | | | | |
| **Donovan McMillon** | DB | 6-1 | 197 | ✪✪✪✪ | McMurray, PA | Peters Township |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 11 safety nationally… Finished second in state wrestling championship. | | | | | | |
| **Dylan Meeks** | DL | 6-2 | 235 | ✪✪✪ | Orlando | Akron |
| Appeared in 33 games at Akron in 2017-19… Had 53 tackles (17 solo), including 2.5 tackles for loss, and was in on one quarterback sack. | | | | | | |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Dakota Mitchell** | DB | 5-11 | 185 | ✪✪✪ | Winter Park | Winter Park |
| Ranked No. 34 safety nationally and No. 71 player in Florida by 247Sports.com… Also played wide receiver and running back. | | | | | | |
| **Yousef Mugharbil** | OL | 6-4 | 300 | ✪✪✪✪ | Murphy, NC | Murphy |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 16 offensive guard nationally and No. 17 player in North Carolina. | | | | | | |
| **Daquan Newkirk** | DL | 6-3 | 318 | ✪✪✪ | Orlando | Auburn |
| Played in 30 games at Auburn from 2018-20… Had 40 tackles (12 solo), including five tackles for loss, and 2.5 quarterback sacks… As a freshman at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, had 48 tackles, including nine tackles for loss. | | | | | | |
| **DaeJon Reynolds** | WR | 6-2 | 201 | ✪✪✪✪ | Springfield, IL | Grayson |
| Ranked No. 46 wide receiver nationally and No. 24 player in Georgia by 247Sports.com… Did not play senior season due to knee injury… As a junior, had 88 receptions for 1,534 yards and 14 touchdowns… Had 130 career receptions for 2,063 yards and 18 touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Tyreak Sapp** | DL | 6-3 | 260 | ✪✪✪✪ | Ft. Lauderdale | St. Thomas Aquinas |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 7 strongside defensive end nationally and No. 15 player in Florida… Had more than 100 career tackles (more than 70 solo), 21.5 quarterback sacks and five fumbles recovered… Helped team to state championship game as a senior. | | | | | | |
| **Antonio Shelton** | DL | 6-3 | 318 | ✪✪✪ | Westerville, OH | Penn State |
| Had 51 career tackles (17 solo), including 12.5 tackles for loss, and six quarterback sacks in 40 games at Penn State. | | | | | | |
| **Jake Slaughter** | OL | 6-4 | 300 | ✪✪✪ | Sparr | Trinity Catholic |
| Ranked No. 10 offensive center nationally and No. 94 player in Florida by 247Sports.com… Blocked for a 2,200-yard rusher as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Christopher Thomas, Jr.** | DL | 6-5 | 314 | ✪✪✪ | Tallahassee | Dunbar |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 27 defensive tackle nationally and No. 68 player in Florida… As a senior, had 88 tackles and nine quarterback sacks. | | | | | | |
| **Rocco Underwood** | LS | 6-4 | 215 | ✪✪✪ | Lake Mary | Lake Mary |
| Ranked No. 113 tight end nationally by 247Sports.com… Had 23 receptions for 347 yards and five touchdowns as a senior. | | | | | | |
| **Desmond Watson** | DL | 6-5 | 432 | ✪✪✪ | Plant City | Armwood |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 23 defensive tackle nationally and No. 57 player in Florida… As a junior, had 65 tackles, including 34 tackles for loss, 10 quarterback sacks and three passes broken up… Helped team to 12-2 record and state playoffs. | | | | | | |
| **Gage Wilcox** | TE | 6-4 | 225 | ✪✪✪✪ | Tampa | Jefferson |
| Ranked No. 12 tight end nationally and No. 46 player in Florida by 247Sports.com. | | | | | | |
| **Jeremiah Williams** | LB | 6-3 | 225 | ✪✪✪✪ | Birmingham, AL | Ramsay |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 5 weakside defensive end nationally and No. 3 player in Alabama… Had 107 tackles, including 25 tackles for loss, and 15 quarterback sacks in sophomore and junior seasons. | | | | | | |
| **Jordan Young** | DB | 6-0 | 189 | ✪✪✪ | Tampa | Gaither |
| Ranked No. 29 cornerback nationally and No. 61 player in Florida by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had an interception in three consecutive games and helped team to an 11-1 record and the state championship playoffs. | | | | | | |

# PLAYER PROFILE

## After Waiting in the Wings, Jones Ready to Fly

It's not often these days that high-profile quarterback recruits stick around multiple years in a program if they don't get the chance to start. For Dan Mullen, that's just part of quarterback development.

He'll put you in here and there to build confidence for when the job is yours. For Emory Jones, that's meant three years of spot duty, biding his time behind Feleipe Franks and Kyle Trask.

It's a tough ask of a quarterback who ranked among the nation's Top 100 recruits in the 2018 class. Jones, after all, narrowed his college choices to Ohio State, Florida State and Auburn … and had originally indicated he would sign with the Buckeyes before choosing Florida.

To spend three years mostly on the sideline, entering games generally to offer a run option rather than actually run the whole offense, was frustrating. He has run the ball 92 times and thrown 86 passes in 24 appearances (accounting for 1,127 yards of total offense).

"When I first got here the first thing he always said to me was, 'Development, development, development,'" Jones said of Mullen. "And I always tried to keep that in the back of my head. It was tough going through all the years just playing a couple plays. It definitely was tough."

Florida hopes the patience and observation helped forge Jones into a player capable of hitting the ground running in the fall as he brings a different look to the offense.

"I feel like Emory does a good job of extending plays," cornerback Kaiir Elam said. "That really scares the defense more than just a pocket passer. I think he's doing a good job of just getting better. I've seen his progression from last year to this year.

"I'm not worried about the offense. I know Coach Mullen and those guys are going to score a lot of points. I'm not worried about that."

Jones won't have much time to settle in. Alabama comes to town in Week 3.

Florida coaches expressed confidence about how quickly Jones emerged in the spring, and Mullen says flatly the 6-2, 210-pound athlete will be ready to go.

"We're constantly on him: consistency and the consistency within his performance," Mullen said. "He has great talent to go make plays.

"But getting the timing down … he really went from a guy that understands the offense to a guy that's making his reads and working on his technique, fundamentals at the quarterback position."

QB

**Emory Jones**

Photo by Freddie Beckwith / Marirmedia or/CSM via ZUMA Wire via AP Images

For more coverage visit lindyssports.com/college-football/sec/florida

# BEST AND BRIGHTEST

## MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

### DE ZACHARY CARTER

Carter opted to return for a fifth season rather than entering the NFL Draft. … Not only is he the team's most physical player setting the edge, he's a team leader. … He led the Gators with five sacks and tied for the team lead with 9.5 tackles for a loss last season. … Carter could have a breakout campaign if a pair of graduate defensive tackles inside can command some double-teams.

## EMERGING STAR

### LB MOHAMOUD DIABATE

After playing primarily as an edge rusher in 2019, Diabate transitioned to linebacker as a sophomore. … It took time for him to adjust to the physical nature of the position, but he finished second on the team with 69 tackles. … With excellent sideline-to-sideline speed, Diabate should be a force in 2021. … Was rated No. 109 nationally in the 2019 recruiting class.

## TOP NEWCOMER

### DT DAQUAN NEWKIRK

An Auburn graduate transfer, Newkirk showed his potential with the Tigers last season after a pair of Achilles tears limited him earlier in his career. … UF immediately moved him into a starting role in the spring at a position of need, and Newkirk could be the stabilizing force the Gators lacked. … Had 40 career tackles in 30 games at Auburn.

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# GEORGIA BULLDOGS

For more coverage of the Bulldogs, visit georgia.247Sports.com

**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Todd Monken **DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Dan Lanning **STADIUM:** Sanford Stadium: 92,746

## GREAT EXPECTATIONS FOR SOME *#UNFINISHEDBUSINESS*

Georgia's offseason — buoyed by the last-second Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl win over Cincinnati — was humming along beautifully.

The Bulldogs landed another top five recruiting class, headlined by quarterback Brock Vandagriff. And while a number of key contributors either applied for the NFL draft or transferred, several vital players announced they were staying at Georgia for the 2021 season.

After quarterback JT Daniels, offensive linemen Jamaree Salyer and Justin Shaffer, receiver Kearis Jackson, utility back James Cook, defensive tackle Devonte Wyatt and outside linebacker Adam Anderson had announced they were returning, another Tweet came that fired up the fan base.

It was from star running back Zamir White:

*"Let's run it back!! #UnfinishedBusiness"*

Wow! These guys really are geared up to win the national cha — .... but then Georgia fans were reminded just how fragile hope can be.

Top receiver George Pickens suffered a torn ACL in spring practice and was likely lost for the season. Days after that devastating blow, Jermaine Burton — perhaps the second most talented receiver — was carted off with a knee injury.

Burton's hyperextended knee turned out to be less serious, but the injuries served as a sobering reminder to pump the brakes on those national title hopes.

The biggest reason that more than four decades have passed since Georgia's last national championship is that, well, a whole lot has to go exactly right to win one of those dang things.

Yet the basis of that hope is legitimate. The offense developed cohesion and explosiveness when Daniels became the starter last season and could be even more dynamic. The defensive front is still among the best in college football. The overall roster is talented and deep.

With Pickens and Burton sidelined, younger receivers got more reps in spring practice. And by the time G-Day rolled around, Daniels and his impressive backups were slinging the ball all over Dooley Field at Sanford Stadium.

Optimism was renewed. This team will not back down from lofty expectations.

"There's no denying we want to win a natty, and I think we have the team to do it," Daniels said. "Obviously, losing George doesn't help, losing an elite top receiver. But it's a great team."

## OFFENSE

Recent history shows how much difference one year can make for a top-flight offense — Florida last year, LSU in 2019, Alabama in 2018. Each transformed from productive one year to nearly unstoppable the next. Those offenses shared some common traits; among them was talent up and down the roster, continuity with veteran leadership, and a sizzling passer.

Therein lies the hope for Georgia's offense.

There's top talent in every room, starting with quarterback JT Daniels. In four starts after replacing Stetson Bennett as the starter, Daniels completed 80 of 119 passes for 1,231 yards, 10 touchdowns and only two interceptions.

In 16 starts combined at Southern California and Georgia, Daniels has thrown 25 touchdown passes, with all but one of those starts (the opener of his sophomore season) working in a new offense with new teammates. Bulldog fans are justifiably excited to see him with a full offseason and spring to develop timing and chemistry with his teammates in Todd Monken's offense designed to push the ball down field.

The backfield is loaded with Zamir White (1,187 career yards with a 5.3 avg., 14 TDs), James Cook (6.7-yard avg. in 2020), Kendall Milton and Kenny McIntosh. Milton seems ready for a breakout season, as he's a tough runner inside, elusive outside, and can catch the football.

Even without George Pickens, the receiving corps is the deepest it has been in years. Kearis Jackson (36 catches last year) established himself as a leader on and off the field. Jermaine Burton and Arian Smith have shown excellent ability.

## SCHEDULE

| Date | Opponent | '20 Record |
|---|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | vs. Clemson (Charlotte, NC) | 10-2 |
| Sept. 11 | UAB | 6-3 |
| Sept. 18 | SOUTH CAROLINA | 2-8 |
| Sept. 25 | at Vanderbilt | 0-9 |
| Oct. 2 | ARKANSAS | 3-7 |
| Oct. 9 | at Auburn | 6-5 |
| Oct. 16 | at Kentucky | 5-6 |
| Oct. 30 | vs. Florida (Jacksonville, FL) | 8-4 |
| Nov. 6 | MISSOURI | 5-5 |
| Nov. 13 | at Tennessee | 3-7 |
| Nov. 20 | CHARLESTON SOUTHERN | |
| Nov. 27 | at Georgia Tech | 3-7 |

## RESULTS

| | 8-2, 7-2 | |
|---|---|---|
| W | at Arkansas | 37-10 |
| W | AUBURN | 27-6 |
| W | TENNESSEE | 44-21 |
| L | at Alabama | 24-41 |
| W | KENTUCKY | 14-3 |
| L | vs. Florida (Jacksonville, FL) | 28-44 |
| W | MISSISSIPPI STATE | 31-24 |
| W | at South Carolina | 45-16 |
| W | at Missouri | 49-14 |
| | VANDERBILT | CAN |
| | **PEACH BOWL** | |
| W | vs. Cincinnati (Atlanta, GA) | 24-21 |

## 10-YEAR WINNING TREND

## AT A GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Athens, Ga.

**2020:** 8-2 overall, 7-2 SEC (2nd, East)

**COACH:** Kirby Smart — At Georgia and overall: 52-14, 5 years

**RETURNING STARTERS:** 14; 7 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:**
QB JT Daniels, RB Zamir White, WR Kearis Jackson, TE Darnell Washington, OL Jamaree Salyer, DT Jordan Davis, OLB Adam Anderson, ILB Nakobe Dean, S Lewis Cine

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:**
After back-to-back seasons of reshaping and restocking, the offense should be explosive again with Daniels settled in along with an impressive group of skilled players and talented o-line. Despite the loss of Azeez Ojulari to the NFL, the defensive front seven remains one of the best in the country.

**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:**
The secondary was gutted by graduations, early departures and transfers. While the receiver corps is talented, they still need to grow and develop in a hurry, and Jackson is the only experienced leader in the bunch.

**KEY LOSSES:**
C Trey Hill, DE Malik Herring, OLB Azeez Ojulari, CB Eric Stokes, CB Tyson Campbell, CB DJ Daniel, S Richard LeCounte

**OVERVIEW:**
As gutsy as Stetson Bennett is, it became clear that Georgia needed a big-time quarterback to win the SEC championship and make the College Football Playoff. The Bulldogs found their man in JT Daniels, and they have surrounded him with enough weapons to be a real threat for the CFP. Being a threat is one thing … getting the right kinds of breaks and key performances is another.

**KEY NUMBER:**
**7** Number of freshmen competing for substantial playing time at cornerback, including four-star Lovasea Carroll, recruited as a running back.

DL
Jordan
DAVIS

Photo by AP Photo/John Bazemore

QB

**JT Daniels**

Photo by Jay Biggerstaff-USA TODAY Sports

## SCOUTING REPORT: Offense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | **JT Daniels*** | Jr. | 1,231 passing yards and 10 TDs in just four games. | Stetson Bennett, Sr. |
| RB | **Zamir White*** | Jr. | Slashing runner led team with 11 TDs in 2020. | James Cook, Sr. |
| WR | Adonai Mitchell | Fr. | Propelled to top of depth chart with impressive spring. | Marcus Rosemy-Jacksaint, So. |
| WR | Kearis Jackson | Jr. | His 36 catches tied Pickens for team lead. | Demetris Robertson, Sr. |
| WR | **Jermaine Burton*** | So. | Emerged in second half of season as a go-to guy. | Arian Smith, So. |
| TE | **Darnell Washington*** | So. | Massive target with speed and great hands. | John FitzPatrick, Jr. |
| LT | Xavier Truss | So. | Deep competition for this spot. | Amarius Mims, Fr. |
| LG | **Jamaree Salyer*** | Sr. | Started last season at LT but a natural guard. | Clay Webb, So. |
| C | Warren Ericson | Jr. | Started two games when Trey Hill was out. | Sedrick Van Pran, So. |
| RG | **Justin Shaffer*** | Sr. | One of the leaders despite limited starts. | Tate Ratledge, Fr. |
| RT | **Warren McClendon*** | So. | Maybe the only constant from last year's line. | Broderick Jones, Fr. |
| PK | **Jack Podlesny*** | So. | Clutch kicker made game-winner vs. Cincinnati. | Jared Zirkel, Fr |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

## SCOUTING REPORT: Defense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | Travon Walker | Jr. | Potentially dominant pass-rusher needs consistency. | Marlin Dean, Fr. |
| NT | **Jordan Davis*** | Sr. | Dominant run-stopper and disrupter. | Jalen Carter, So. |
| DT | **Devonte Wyatt*** | Sr. | Opened eyes with a strong spring performance. | Julian Rochester, Sr. |
| LB | Nolan Smith | Jr. | Had 20 QB pressures as a backup. | Robert Beal Jr., Sr. |
| LB | **Nakobe Dean*** | Jr. | Fills key role as leader of the defense. | Channing Tindall, Sr. |
| LB | Quay Walker | Sr. | Had a breakthrough season last year (43 tackles). | Rian Davis, So. |
| LB | Adam Anderson | Sr. | Had 24 QB hurries and 6.5 sacks in backup role. | Xavian Sorey Jr., Fr. |
| CB | Ameer Speed | Sr. | Earned respect with his perseverance. | Kelee Ringo, Fr. |
| CB | Jalen Kimber | Fr. | Redshirt played in three games last year. | Lovasea Carroll, Fr. |
| S | **Lewis Cine*** | Jr. | Now the leader of the secondary. | Dan Jackson, So. |
| FS | Tykee Smith | Jr. | Transfer from West Virginia; started 18 games. | **Christopher Smith, Sr.*** |
| P | **Jake Camarda*** | Sr. | Finalist for the Ray Guy Award last season. | Noah Jones, Fr. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

Senior Demetris Robertson caught 30 passes two years ago and still provides depth and leadership. Marcus Rosemy-Jacksaint and Dominick Blaylock are coming off injuries and their returns would help, too. But freshman Adonai Mitchell might be the most talented of the bunch.

Having so many deep threats opens intermediate routes for tight ends, a strength for Georgia. Six-foot-seven sophomore Darnell Washington is a matchup nightmare who followed a three-catch Peach Bowl performance with a solid offseason.

Matt Luke's problem as offensive line coach isn't finding five quality players but finding the best five-man unit.

Case in point: Jamaree Salyer will start somewhere, either at left tackle as he did last season or at left guard, his more natural position. Warren Ericson at center and Warren McClendon at right tackle are the closest sure-things. Justin Shaffer returns at right guard, but he's being pushed hard by Tate Ratledge.

Left tackle is the fiercest battle with Xavier Truss, Broderick Jones and Amarius Mims likely to battle through camp.

## DEFENSE

One of Kirby Smart's biggest concerns from G-Day was the amount of pressure the defensive line was able to put on the quarterback. But the Bulldogs like to think that can be attributed to an adjusting offensive line facing one of the best front seven units in the country.

Tackles Devonte Wyatt, Jalen Carter and Jordan Davis will cause problems for lots of offensive lines. Wyatt has made the most gains of anyone on defense, and Carter showed his athleticism as a freshman by serving as the short-yardage fullback. Davis is the run-stopper in the middle who was the key to Georgia leading the nation in rushing defense.

Travon Walker, other than his huge sack at Auburn in 2019, played in the shadow of Malik Herring, but with Herring gone, Walker will get his chance on every down.

The Bulldogs are well stocked at linebacker. Nakobe Dean has become the leader of the defense and heads a talented group inside. Quay Walker is the other starter, with Channing Tindall, Rian Davis, Trezmen Marshall and Smael Mondon Jr. battling for key backup roles.

Outside linebacker is again talented but not as deep as it has been. Adam Anderson and Nolan Smith are the starters. Smith wasn't as dominant as second-round pick Azeez Ojulari or Jermaine Johnson (who transferred to Florida State), but he was credited with 20 quarterback pressures last season.

Robert Beal Jr. considered transferring last year but decided to stay, which is a good thing. He's the only proven backup. Freshmen Xavian Sorey Jr. and Chaz Chambliss will push for playing time.

Anderson is a guy with a lot of reach and range — drawing comparisons to former Bulldog Leonard Floyd, although it remains to be seen whether he will develop into the complete package as Floyd,

## TOP 5 NFL PROSPECTS

**1. Lewis Cine** S 6-1 200 4.49 Jr.

An impressive tackler who is stout in run support and coverage, Cine is the next defensive back in the Georgia pipeline to the NFL. Cine has earned a bit of a reputation as a headhunter due to his devastating hits. He was ejected last year in the Florida game on a targeting call against tight end Kyle Pitts. Still, he continued to play aggressively the rest of the season without any further altercations or personal fouls.

Last season, he totaled 52 tackles in 10 games, including a tackle for a loss and three passes defended. Cine moves well and is a fluid athlete. Although he has yet to register a sack in college, he can be utilized effectively as a blitzing safety capable of bringing pressure. He also has experience on special teams from early in his career, which is an added boost for his draft stock. His demeanor and overall skill-set should make him one of the top safeties come April.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2. George Pickens** | WR | 6-3 | 200 | 4.56 | Jr. |
| **3. Jordan Davis** | DT | 6-6 | 340 | 5.40 | Sr. |
| **4. Adam Anderson** | OLB | 6-5 | 230 | 4.58 | Sr. |
| **5. Travon Walker** | DE | 6-5 | 275 | 4.99 | Jr. |

— Ric Serritella, NFL Draft Bible

a former first-round draft pick who signed a four-year, $64-million contract with the L.A. Rams in the spring.

Last year, Anderson tied for second on the team with 24 QB pressures and 6.5 sacks, and the coaches are confident in his coverage skills enough that they experimented with leaving him on the field in passing downs.

But that brings us to the biggest question about the roster. One reason they want to leave Anderson on the field is the shortage of experienced defensive backs.

Not many teams can weather the loss of six top defensive backs — an astounding five to the NFL (Eric Stokes, 1st round), Tyson Campbell (2nd), Richard LeCounte (5th), Mark Webb (7th), and DJ Daniel (free agent signee) — plus Tyrique Stevenson, who transferred to Miami. That left safeties Lewis Cine and Chris Smith with the most experience, although Smart and the staff continued to eye the transfer portal for help.

They brought in Tykee Smith from West Virginia and Brandon Turnage from Alabama, of all places.

Still, the Bulldogs were scrambling in the spring to develop youngsters into starting-quality SEC players. Ameer Speed and Jalen Kimber finished spring as the starting corners, with Kelee Ringo and Lovasea Carroll (a highly touted recruit at running back) pushing them. Freshman Nyland Green could challenge for meaningful playing time.

If the young cornerbacks can grow up quickly, the Bulldogs figure to find themselves in the race for one of the four College Football Playoff spots. If they can't, this team will have to win some shootouts.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

The kicking game is a strength. Jack Podlesny beat out a top recruit for the starting job last season, then made 13 of 16 field goal attempts, including 3-for-3 and the game-winner against Cincinnati. Punter Jake Camarda averaged 46.6 yards, was voted SEC Special Teams Player of the Year by the coaches and was one of three finalists for the Ray Guy Award.

OL **Jamaree Salyer**

Photo by Jay Biggerstaff-USA TODAY Sports

The return game looks solid, too: Kearis Jackson had a 52-yard punt return against South Carolina and a 56-yard kickoff return against Florida. Dominick Blaylock's return would be a boost on special teams.

## SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

The Bulldogs will find out quickly where they stand nationally, opening against Clemson in Charlotte, N.C. The Dawgs and Tigers once enjoyed a fierce regional rivalry. Georgia has won six of the last seven meetings, most recently in 2014.

A win would be a huge injection of national credibility, but a loss would not necessarily ruin their playoff hopes because they could still run the table and reach the SEC Championship Game.

The rest of the Bulldogs' schedule sets up nicely with Arkansas at home replacing Alabama away as the cross-over game. Significantly, they have a week off before the showdown with Florida on Oct. 30.

— Guerry Clegg

### 2018 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 37.9 | 14 |
| Rushing | 238.8 | 16 |
| Passing | 226.1 | 72 |
| Total | 464.9 | 18 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 19.2 | 15 |
| Rushing | 134.0 | 31 |
| Passing | 180.3 | 12 |
| Total | 314.3 | 13 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 3 | + 0.21 | 50 |

### 2019 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 30.8 | 50 |
| Rushing | 185.1 | 41 |
| Passing | 223.0 | 72 |
| Total | 408.1 | 61 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 12.6 | 1 |
| Rushing | 74.6 | 1 |
| Passing | 201.1 | 31 |
| Total | 275.7 | 3 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 3 | + 0.21 | 49 |

### 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 32.3 | 38 |
| Rushing | 174.2 | 56 |
| Passing | 249.9 | 45 |
| Total | 424.1 | 41 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 20.0 | T-16 |
| Rushing | 72.3 | 1 |
| Passing | 248.7 | 88 |
| Total | 321.0 | 12 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 2 | - 0.20 | T-74 |

# NOTEBOOK

In this age of the overcrowded transfer portal, **Carson Beck** deserves a nod of appreciation.

Even as Georgia struggled to establish a quarterback last season until **JT Daniels** emerged, Beck never was given a chance to see what he could do. So when **Brock Vandagriff** signed with the Bulldogs, and **Gunner Stockton** flipped his 2022 commitment from South Carolina to Georgia, it seemed inevitable that Beck would transfer.

But Beck stayed and started ahead of Vandagriff and **Stetson Bennett** in the spring game. He completed 21 of 31 passes for 236 yards and two touchdowns.

"I'm pleased with his progress. I think he got better," Georgia coach **Kirby Smart** said.

"He didn't always have the focus he needed last year as a freshman in terms of preparation, academics, on the field, off the field, in the meeting room. In the spring, he's taken notes, he's got command of it better, he's doing better academically. He's trying to take a step forward."

• How the running back rotation will shake out remains to be seen. Smart likes rotating backs to keep them fresh and take advantage of their strengths. And while there may not be a **Nick Chubb**, **Sony Michel** or **D'Andre Swift** in the bunch, the Bulldogs are hardly short on talent.

**Zamir White** will start again, and the coaches are trying to utilize **James Cook**'s explosive playmaking ability. Yet sophomore **Kendall Milton** is simply too good to keep off the field.

• Defensive coordinator **Dan Lanning** was a candidate for the Kansas head coaching job that went to Buffalo's **Lance Leipold** in early May. Still, Lanning seems on the fast track to becoming a Power 5 head coach.

If and when that happens, Smart won't have to look far to find a defensive coordinator. He hired **Will Muschamp** as an analyst in the offseason after Muschamp was fired as South Carolina's head coach. It would likely take another head coaching job to pry Muschamp away from Georgia.

He returned to Athens in his first chance to work at his alma mater since his playing days ended in 1994. His son Jackson is a walk-on quarterback for the Bulldogs.

## OPPOSING COACHES VIEW

• "I don't know if it took Georgia that long to figure out that JT Daniels was the quarterback or it was because he was coming back from (knee surgery). But now the quarterback position is solidified and they've got good receivers and good running backs. I think Georgia should win the East because the East sucks. The SEC East in 2021 will be the worst it's been in the last 25 years. . . .

• "With the talent he has, Kirby Smart should be playing in the SEC Championship Game against Alabama and should make the College Football Playoff. There's no reason not to be there. . . .

• "They've got a good young defensive coordinator (Dan Lanning) who's really good with the kids. He's a good teacher and the kids like him. And he's got talent to work with. Kirby Smart's biggest thing is he needs to get out of his own way and let his assistants coach."

# BULLDOGS SPRING ROSTER

| Quarterback | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15 Carson Beck | QB | 6-4 | 215 | Fr. | Jacksonville, FL |
| 13 Stetson Bennett | QB | 5-11 | 190 | Sr. | Blackshear |
| 18 JT Daniels | QB | 6-3 | 210 | Jr. | Irvine, CA |
| 27 Austin Kirksey | QB | 6-3 | 205 | So. | Marietta |
| 14 Jackson Muschamp | QB | 6-2 | 190 | Fr. | Columbia, SC |
| 24 Nathan Priestley | QB | 6-4 | 205 | So. | Los Angeles, CA |
| 12 Brock Vandagriff | QB | 6-3 | 205 | Fr. | Bogart |
| **Running Back** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 12 Lovasea Carroll | RB | 6-1 | 195 | Fr. | Warrenton |
| 20 Sevaughn Clark | RB | 6-1 | 215 | So. | Dawsonville |
| 4 James Cook | RB | 5-11 | 190 | Sr. | Miami, FL |
| 33 Daijun Edwards | RB | 5-10 | 201 | So. | Norman Park |
| 36 Garrett Jones | RB | 6-0 | 203 | Jr. | Albany |
| 45 Kurt Knisely | RB | 6-0 | 200 | Fr. | Watkinsville |
| 6 Kenny McIntosh | RB | 6-1 | 210 | Jr. | Ft. Lauderdale, FL |
| 2 Kendall Milton | RB | 6-1 | 220 | So. | Fresno, Ca. |
| 3 Zamir White | RB | 6-0 | 215 | Jr. | Laurinburg, NC |
| **Wide Receivers** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 8 Dominick Blaylock | WR | 6-1 | 205 | So. | Marietta |
| 7 Jermaine Burton | WR | 6-0 | 200 | So. | Calabasas, CA |
| 83 Kaustov Chakrabarti | WR | 5-7 | 160 | So. | Lilburn |
| 89 Braxton Hicks | WR | 6-2 | 195 | Fr. | Tiger |
| 10 Kearis Jackson | WR | 6-0 | 200 | Jr. | Fort Valley |
| 23 Jaylen Johnson | WR | 6-2 | 192 | Jr. | Duluth |
| 84 Ladd McConkey | WR | 6-0 | 185 | Fr. | Chatsworth |
| 17 Jackson Meeks | WR | 6-2 | 205 | Fr. | Phenix City, AL |
| 5 Adonai Mitchell | WR | 6-4 | 190 | Fr. | Missouri City, TX |
| 25 Steven Peterson | WR | 6-2 | 214 | Jr. | Kennesaw |
| 1 George Pickens | WR | 6-3 | 200 | Jr. | Hoover, AL |
| 16 Demetris Robertson | WR | 6-0 | 190 | Sr. | Savannah |
| 9 Justin Robinson | WR | 6-4 | 220 | Fr. | McDonough |
| 81 Marcus Rosemy-Jacksaint | WR | 6-2 | 195 | So. | Pompano Beach, FL |
| 11 Arian Smith | WR | 6-0 | 185 | Fr. | Bradley, FL |
| 39 Brady Tindall | WR | 5-10 | 192 | Sr. | Atlanta |
| 46 George Vining | WR | 6-0 | 205 | So. | Macon |
| **Tight Ends** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 19 Brock Bowers | TE | 6-4 | 230 | Fr. | Napa, CA |
| 86 John FitzPatrick | TE | 6-7 | 250 | Jr. | Atlanta |
| 88 Ryland Goede | TE | 6-6 | 240 | So. | Kennesaw |
| 44 Michael Hagerty | TE | 6-4 | 225 | So. | Hinesville |
| 43 Chase Harof | TE | 6-2 | 250 | Sr. | Roswell |
| 80 Brett Seither | TE | 6-5 | 228 | So. | Clearwater, FL |
| 0 Darnell Washington | TE | 6-7 | 265 | So. | Las Vegas, NV |
| **Offensive Lineman** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 58 Austin Blaske | OL | 6-5 | 310 | Fr. | Faulkville |
| 68 Chris Brown | OL | 6-5 | 300 | Fr. | Savannah |
| 75 Owen Condon | OL | 6-7 | 310 | Jr. | Oklahoma City, OK |
| 50 Warren Ericson | OL | 6-4 | 305 | Jr. | Suwanee |
| 76 Miles Johnson | OL | 6-5 | 320 | Fr. | Blue Ridge |
| 59 Broderick Jones | OL | 6-4 | 315 | Fr. | Lithonia |
| 52 Cameron Kinnie | OL | 6-3 | 300 | Fr. | Suwanee |
| 78 Chad Lindberg | OL | 6-6 | 325 | Fr. | League City, TX |
| 70 Warren McClendon | OL | 6-4 | 300 | So. | Brunswick |
| 65 Amarius Mims | OL | 6-7 | 330 | Fr. | Cochran |
| 56 Micah Morris | OL | 6-6 | 330 | Fr. | Kingsland |
| 66 Dalton Perry | OL | 6-3 | 250 | Fr. | Bixby, OK |
| 51 Tate Ratledge | OL | 6-6 | 320 | Fr. | Rome |
| 69 Jamaree Salyer | OL | 6-4 | 325 | Sr. | Atlanta |
| 54 Justin Shaffer | OL | 6-4 | 330 | Sr. | Ellenwood |
| 73 Xavier Truss | OL | 6-7 | 330 | So. | West Warwick, RI |
| 63 Sedrick Van Pran | OL | 6-4 | 310 | Fr. | New Orleans, LA |
| 64 David Vann | OL | 6-4 | 305 | So. | Jesup |
| 79 Weston Wallace | OL | 6-4 | 320 | Fr. | Eatonton |
| 61 Blake Watson | OL | 6-6 | 300 | Jr. | Roswell |
| 60 Clay Webb | OL | 6-3 | 290 | So. | Oxford, AL |
| 77 Devin Willock | OL | 6-7 | 335 | Fr. | New Milford, NJ |
| **Defensive Lineman** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 97 Warren Brinson | DT | 6-4 | 305 | So. | Savannah |
| 54 Cade Brock | DL | 6-0 | 250 | Fr. | Subligna |
| 88 Jalen Carter | DL | 6-3 | 310 | So. | Apopka, FL |
| 99 Jordan Davis | DL | 6-6 | 340 | Sr. | Charlotte, NC |
| 55 Marlin Dean | DL | 6-5 | 275 | Fr. | Bowman |
| 93 Tyrion Ingram-Dawkins | DL | 6-5 | 300 | Fr. | Gaffney, SC |
| 94 Jonathan Jefferson | DL | 6-3 | 295 | Fr. | Douglasville |
| 96 Zion Logue | DL | 6-5 | 295 | So. | Lebanon, TN |
| 91 Tymon Mitchell | DL | 6-3 | 300 | So. | Nashville, TN |
| 45 Bill Norton | DL | 6-6 | 300 | So. | Memphis, TN |
| 92 Julian Rochester | DL | 6-5 | 300 | Sr. | Mableton |
| 78 Nazir Stackhouse | DL | 6-3 | 320 | So. | Stone Mountain |
| 44 Travon Walker | DL | 6-5 | 275 | Jr. | Thomaston |
| 90 Tramel Walthour | DL | 6-3 | 280 | Jr. | Hinesville |
| 95 Devonte Wyatt | DL | 6-3 | 315 | Sr. | Decatur |
| **Linebackers** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 19 Adam Anderson | OLB | 6-5 | 230 | Sr. | Rome |
| 33 Robert Beal | OLB | 6-4 | 255 | Sr. | Norcross |
| 24 Matthew Brown | OLB | 6-2 | 230 | Jr. | Guyton |
| 32 Chaz Chambliss | LB | 6-2 | 250 | Fr. | Carrollton |
| 0 Rian Davis | ILB | 6-2 | 230 | So. | Apopka, FL |
| 17 Nakobe Dean | ILB | 6-0 | 225 | Jr. | Horn Lake, MS |
| 15 Trezmen Marshall | ILB | 6-1 | 230 | So. | Homerville |
| 2 Smael Mondon Jr. | LB | 6-3 | 220 | Fr. | Dallas |
| 8 MJ Sherman | OLB | 6-2 | 235 | So. | Baltimore, MD |
| 4 Nolan Smith | OLB | 6-3 | 235 | Jr. | Savannah |
| 18 Xavian Sorey Jr. | LB | 6-3 | 214 | Fr. | Campbellton, FL |
| 35 John Staton IV | LB | 6-1 | 225 | Gr. | Atlanta |
| 41 Channing Tindall | ILB | 6-2 | 230 | Sr. | Columbia, SC |
| 7 Quay Walker | ILB | 6-4 | 240 | Sr. | Cordele |
| **Defensive Backs** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 26 Daran Branch | DB | 6-2 | 190 | Fr. | Amite, LA |
| 36 Latavious Brini | DB | 6-2 | 210 | Sr. | Miami Gardens, FL |
| 22 Javon Bullard | DB | 5-11 | 180 | Fr. | Milledgeville |
| 20 Major Burns | DB | 6-2 | 190 | So. | Baton Rouge, LA |
| 43 Jehlen Cannady | DB | 6-0 | 176 | Fr. | Macon |
| 16 Lewis Cine | DB | 6-1 | 200 | Jr. | Cedar Hill, TX |
| 14 David Daniel | DB | 6-2 | 185 | Fr. | Woodstock |
| 1 Nyland Green | DB | 6-1 | 185 | Fr. | Covington |
| 47 Dan Jackson | DB | 6-1 | 190 | So. | Gainesville |
| 6 Jalen Kimber | DB | 6-0 | 170 | Fr. | Mansfield, TX |
| 31 William Poole | DB | 6-0 | 190 | Sr. | Atlanta |
| 5 Kelee Ringo | DB | 6-2 | 205 | Fr. | Tacoma, WA |
| 29 Christopher Smith | DB | 5-11 | 190 | Sr. | Atlanta |
| 9 Ameer Speed | DB | 6-3 | 211 | Sr. | Jacksonville, FL |
| 38 Patrick Taylor | DB | 6-0 | 175 | Fr. | Johns Creek |
| **Specialist** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 90 Jake Camarda | PK/P | 6-2 | 180 | Sr. | Norcross |
| 95 Noah Chumley | P | 6-3 | 185 | So. | Savannah |
| 98 Noah Jones | P | 6-0 | 165 | Fr. | Cairo |
| 56 William Mote | SN | 6-2 | 230 | So. | Hoover, AL |
| 96 Jack Podlesny | PK | 6-1 | 180 | Jr. | St. Simons Island |
| 47 Payne Walker | SN | 6-2 | 249 | Jr. | Suwanee |
| 99 Jared Zirkel | PK | 6-3 | 185 | Fr. | Kerrville, TX |

# INDIVIDUAL STATS

## PASSING

| NAME | GP | Effic | Cmp | Att | Int | Pct | Yards | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| JT Daniels | 4 | 178.5 | 80 | 119 | 2 | 67.2 | 1231 | 10 | 55 | 307.8 |
| S. Bennett | 8 | 128.7 | 86 | 155 | 6 | 55.5 | 1179 | 8 | 82 | 147.4 |

## RECEIVING

| RECEIVING | GP | No. | Yards | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K. Jackson | 10 | 36 | 514 | 14.3 | 3 | 49 | 51.4 |
| G. Pickens | 8 | 36 | 513 | 14.3 | 6 | 51 | 64.1 |
| J. Burton | 10 | 27 | 404 | 14.9 | 3 | 49 | 40.4 |

## RUSHING

| RUSHING | GP | Att. | Gain | Loss | Net | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Z. White | 10 | 144 | 793 | 14 | 779 | 5.4 | 11 | 75 | 77.9 |
| J. Cook | 8 | 45 | 312 | 9 | 303 | 6.7 | 3 | 44 | 37.9 |
| K. McIntosh | 8 | 47 | 263 | 12 | 251 | 5.3 | 1 | 32 | 31.4 |

## DEF. LEADERS

Tackles: N. Dean 71, L. Cine 52, M. Rice 49
Tackles for loss: A. Ojulari 12.5, A. Anderson 6.5, J. Johnson 5
Sacks: A. Ojulari 8.5, A. Anderson 6.5, J. Johnson 5
Interceptions: E. Stokes 4, R. LeCounte 3, T. Campbell 1, M. Webb 1

# 247SPORTS BULLDOGS RECRUITING 2021

## 3 NEWCOMERS OF IMPACT

### Amarius Mims

Mims burst onto the recruiting scene at the end of his sophomore season. The former basketball player went from 6-4 to a shade under 6-8 as a senior. He has all the tools to be an elite left tackle for the Bulldogs sooner rather than later.

### Nyland Green

Green was an All-American Bowl selection as a cornerback in his senior season. He is in a big position of need for the Bulldogs, and he comes to campus with desired size and speed. The 6-foot-2 defender has drawn comparisons to Atlanta Falcons cornerback AJ Terrell.

### Brock Vandagriff

Vandagriff is not likely to be counted on in his first season in Athens, but he does bring a very nice skillset to the Bulldogs. At 6-3, 205, Vandagriff can drive the ball into tight windows or extend plays with his legs.

## SLEEPER

### Adonai Mitchell

The three-star wide receiver from Texas got to campus in January. The buzz around the 6-4 wideout from spring practice has to excite the UGA staff and certainly the fanbase. He is likely to step on the field in the fall and see meaningful snaps.

## 2022 NEEDS

Quarterback depth is always a need, and Georgia addressed that quickly with the verbal commitment of Gunner Stockton. Wide receiver is a position where the Bulldogs are trying to add speed with this class. Defensive line is another position of priority where Georgia is trying to bring in players who will be key contributors in the future.

— Rusty Mansell

## 247SPORTS COMPOSITE

| 4 | 11 | 5 | 0 |
|---|---|---|---|
| ✪✪✪✪✪ | ✪✪✪✪ | ✪✪✪ | ✪✪ |

| | |
|---|---|
| Committments | 20 |
| Average Stars | 3.95 |
| Total Stars | 79 |
| National Rank: 4 | SEC: 3 |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Brock Bowers** | TE | 6-4 | 230 | ✪✪✪✪ | Napa, CA | Napa |

247Sports.com rated No. 102 player and No. 3 tight end nationally and No. 10 player in California… Played tight end, running back, wide receiver, linebacker and kick returner… As a junior, had 1,499 all-purpose yards and 18 touchdowns… Had 39 receptions for 1,098 yards and 14 touchdowns.

| **Javon Bullard** | DB | 5-11 | 180 | ✪✪✪ | Milledgeville | Baldwin |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Ranked No. 51 cornerback nationally and No. 57 player in Georgia by 247Sports.com… Had 74 tackles, including seven tackles for loss, two quarterback sacks and 10 passes broken up as a senior… Had 13 receptions for 283 yards and four touchdowns.

| **Lovasea Carroll** | RB | 6-1 | 195 | ✪✪✪✪ | Warrenton | IMG Academy |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

247Sports.com rated No. 6 running back nationally and No. 18 player in Florida… Had 2,481 yards rushing on 242 carries in three seasons… As a senior, had 464 yards rushing and seven touchdowns on 41 carries… Helped team to 8-0 record and No. 1 ranking nationally.

| **Chaz Chambliss** | LB | 6-2 | 250 | ✪✪✪✪ | Carrollton | Carrollton |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Ranked No. 17 outside linebacker nationally and No. 24 player in Georgia… Had 251 tackles (166 solo), including 73.5 tackles for loss, 31.5 quarterback sacks, two fumbles caused, three fumbles recovered, and 53 quarterback hurries in three seasons.

| **David Daniel** | DB | 6-2 | 185 | ✪✪✪✪ | Woodstock | Woodstock |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

247Sports.com rated No. 92 player and No. 3 athlete nationally and No. 10 player in Georgia… Had 123 tackles (94 solo), one quarterback sack, two interceptions and three fumbles caused.

| **Marlin Dean** | DL | 6-5 | 275 | ✪✪✪ | Bowman | IMG Academy |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Ranked No. 32 defensive tackle nationally and No. 71 player in Florida by 247Sports.com… Helped team to 8-0 record and No. 1 ranking nationally as a senior… Had 18 tackles (nine solo), two quarterback sacks, one interception and one fumble recovered.

| **Jamon Dumas-Johnson** | LB | 6-1 | 235 | ✪✪✪✪ | Hyattsville, MD | St. Frances Academy |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

247Sports.com rated No. 10 inside linebacker nationally and No. 9 player in Maryland… As a junior, helped team to 11-1 record and No. 3 national ranking.

| **Dylan Fairchild** | OL | 6-5 | 300 | ✪✪✪✪ | Cumming | West Forsyth |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Ranked No. 97 player and No. 5 offensive guard nationally and No. 11 player in Georgia by 247Sports.com.

| **Nyland Green** | DB | 6-1 | 185 | ✪✪✪✪ | Covington | Newton |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

247Sports.com rated No. 69 player and No. 5 defensive back nationally and No. 9 player in Georgia… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game… As a junior, had 34 tackles, two fumbles recovered, and six interceptions, returning two for touchdowns.

| **Tyrion Ingram-Dawkins** | DL | 6-5 | 300 | ✪✪✪✪ | Gaffney, SC | Gaffney |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Ranked No. 11 defensive tackle nationally and No. 1 player in South Carolina by 247Sports.com… Had 31 tackles, seven quarterback sacks and three passes deflected as a senior… As a junior, had 70 tackles, including 17 tackles for loss, and eight quarterback sacks.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Jonathan Jefferson** | DL | 6-3 | 285 | ✪✪✪✪ | Douglasville | Douglas County |

247Sports.com rated No. 13 strongside defensive end nationally and No. 15 player in Georgia… As a senior, had 19 tackles for loss and 10 quarterback sacks… Had 254 career tackles, including 51 tackles for loss, and 41 quarterback sacks.

| **Kamari Lassiter** | DB | 6-0 | 180 | ✪✪✪✪ | Savannah | American Christ. Acad. (Tuscaloosa, AL) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Ranked No. 18 defensive back nationally and No. 8 player in Alabama by 247Sports.com… Had 210 tackles, including 20 tackles for loss, 10 interceptions, 22 passes broken up, and four fumbles caused as a senior… Had 103 career receptions for 2,488 yards and 35 touchdowns.

| **Jackson Meeks** | WR | 6-2 | 205 | ✪✪✪ | Phenix City, AL | Central |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

247Sports.com rated No. 102 wide receiver nationally and No. 30 player in Alabama.

| **Amarius Mims** | OL | 6-7 | 330 | ✪✪✪✪✪ | Cochran | Bleckley County |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Ranked No. 7 player and No. 3 offensive tackle nationally and No. 1 player in Georgia by 247Sports.com… Helped team average 378.6 yards per game, including 213.3 yards rushing, as a senior… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game.

| **Adoni Mitchell** | WR | 6-4 | 190 | ✪✪✪ | Missouri City, TX | Cane Ridge |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

247Sports.com rated No. 64 wide receiver nationally and No. 10 player in Texas… As a senior, had 49 receptions for 795 yards and 11 touchdowns… Had 25 receptions for 378 yards and three touchdowns as a junior.

| **Smael Mondon** | LB | 6-3 | 220 | ✪✪✪✪✪ | Dallas | Paulding County |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Ranked No. 29 player and No. 2 outside linebacker nationally and No. 3 player in Georgia by 247Sports.com… Had 83 career tackles (49 solo), one interception, one fumble caused and two fumbles recovered… Played quarterback, running back and wide receiver… Had 1,129 all-purpose yards with 13 rushing touchdowns and two receiving touchdowns.

| **Micah Morris** | OL | 6-6 | 330 | ✪✪✪✪ | Kingsland | Camden County |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

247Sports.com rated No. 63 player and No. 10 offensive tackle nationally and No. 7 player in Georgia.

| **Xavian Sorey, Jr.** | LB | 6-3 | 214 | ✪✪✪✪✪ | Campbellton, FL | IMG Academy |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Ranked No. 20 player and No. 1 outside linebacker nationally and No. 6 player in Florida by 247Sports.com… Helped team to 8-0 record and No. 1 national ranking as a senior… Had eight tackles, including two tackles for loss, in three games… As a junior, had 638 yards rushing and three touchdowns… Had 57 tackles and three interceptions.

| **Brock Vandagriff** | QB | 6-3 | 205 | ✪✪✪✪✪ | Bogart | Prince Avenue Christian |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

247Sports.com rated No. 14 player and No. 2 dual-threat quarterback nationally and No. 2 player in Georgia… Led team to 11-1 record as a senior… Had 3,342 yards passing and 40 touchdowns with six interceptions… Had 394 yards rushing and 13 touchdowns… As a junior, had 2,471 yards passing and 31 touchdowns with three interceptions.

| **Jared Wilson** | OL | 6-3 | 330 | ✪✪✪ | Winston-Salem, NC | West Forsyth |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Ranked No. 20 offensive guard nationally and No. 23 player in North Carolina by 247Sports.com… Senior season postponed to spring 2021… Helped team to 11-2 record as a junior… Had 71 pancake blocks and did not allow a quarterback sack… Helped team to 3,000 yards rushing and 42 touchdowns.

# PLAYER PROFILE

## WR Jackson is Ready to Lead this Dawg Pack

Kearis Jackson persevered through adversity in his three years with Georgia, and now after reaching the spotlight, he has one sort of nebulous goal and one very specific goal.

"One of my main goals is just being a leader, be there for my teammates," Jackson said.

"It's a team sport. Every team needs leaders. So I'm big on leadership, knowing I'm not only pushing myself but pushing the ones around me, just trying to become the best route-running, best yards-after-catch guy in this league.

"That's one of my goals for this year. Just win games for my teammates."

Another goal, he said, is to win a championship.

Jackson worked hard as a freshman in 2018, awaiting his turn behind Mecole Hardman, Riley Ridley, Terry Godwin, Jeremiah Holloman and Jayson Stanley.

The following season, he won a starting job and had two catches in the opener against Vanderbilt … only to suffer a broken hand and miss most of the season, which was particularly frustrating as the Dawgs desperately needed another receiver to step up.

Then last year, Jackson started only two games but tied George Pickens for the team lead with 36 catches and led the Bulldogs with 514 yards. He also was the team's leading return man and had a 52-yard punt return against South Carolina and a 56-yard kickoff return against Florida.

With Pickens lost for most (if not all) of the season with a torn ACL, Jackson knows he's going to have to lead a talented-but-young bunch of receivers if the Bulldogs are to contend for a championship. He welcomes the opportunity.

Coach Kirby Smart appointed him as Georgia's representative to the SEC Football Leadership Council. Part of that is taking classes on leadership.

Jackson's leadership is not merely symbolic. He is Georgia's best all-around receiver because he's a tenacious blocker and works hours on the little things that can make a difference.

WR
KEARIS JACKSON
Photo by Dale Zanine-USA TODAY Sports

"Learning how to be a good receiver is learning all the small details," Jackson said. "That's what separates you. Knowing what type of defense the opponents are in, how to run certain routes against certain coverages, how to beat certain leverages.

"There's a lot to it. It's all about getting in the film room. What you see on film is what you see in the games. If you study film then you'll know what's going to come when it gets to the game."

For more coverage visit lindyssports.com/college-football/sec/georgia

# BEST AND BRIGHTEST

## MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

### QB JT DANIELS

His 10 TD passes ranked eighth in SEC despite playing in only four games. … The USC transfer finally got healthy after suffering an ACL tear in the 2019 opener with the Trojans, and in his first start for the Dawgs he completed 28 of 38 passes for 401 yards and four TDs. … Remember, he was the No. 3-rated QB nationally in the 2018 class behind Trevor Lawrence and Justin Fields.

## EMERGING STAR

### TE DARNELL WASHINGTON

Tre' McKitty's departure clears the way for Washington to become a focal point of the offense. … At 6-7, he's a matchup nightmare for linebackers and defensive backs. … Three of his seven catches came in Peach Bowl win over Cincinnati. … Rated even rated higher than LSU signee Arik Gilbert in the 2020 signing class by some recruiting analysts. Was a 5-star recruit according to the 247Sports Composite rankings, which had him as the No. 1 prospect in Nevada.

## TOP NEWCOMER

### WR ADONAI MITCHELL

Injuries to George Pickens and Jermaine Burton opened the door for Mitchell in spring practice. He caught seven passes for 105 yards in spring game, including a 24-yard touchdown over starting safety Lewis Cine.… Mitchell, who did not play in 2020 due to COVID-19, is an excellent route-runner who can break away after the catch. … Picked Georgia over offers from Ole Miss, Auburn, Arkansas and others.

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# KENTUCKY WILDCATS

For more coverage of the Wildcats, visit kentucky.247Sports.com

**OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS:** Liam Coen **DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Brad White **STADIUM:** Kroger Field: 67,942

## WILDCATS BRING IN OC COEN TO IGNITE PASSING ATTACK

You know Kentucky can run the ball and that it can defend with the best in the country.

What the Wildcats have failed to deliver for most of Mark Stoops' tenure, though, is a passing attack that keeps opponents guessing and attracts higher-level weapons. Over the past two seasons, in particular, they've barely managed to put balls in the air, let alone scorch SEC defensive backs with the frequency needed to put them in the mix for division titles.

The hire of Los Angeles Rams assistant Liam Coen between the end of the regular season and UK's Gator Bowl victory over NC State — the Cats' third straight win in the postseason — is the program's biggest signal yet that it's willing to do what's necessary to be a true threat in the league.

Former offensive coordinator Eddie Gran helped take UK to nice heights, but he plateaued. Stoops gambled by making the tough call and firing his friend (along with quarterbacks coach Darin Hinshaw) to make a gamble. The Gran-Hinshaw combo could have won 7-8 games year in and year out for the foreseeable future; Stoops hopes to deliver more.

Coen isn't the only newcomer to the staff this fall.

John Settle, formerly of Wisconsin, came over to coach the running backs (formerly Gran's responsibility) after six seasons in what was his second go-around with the Badgers. Eric Wolford, previously at South Carolina, succeeds the late John Schlarman as the Wildcats' offensive line coach.

Upheaval on the sideline is matched by the roster: Kentucky will start a new quarterback (to be determined) and at least one new wide receiver (Nebraska transfer Wan'Dale Robinson), along with two new starters on an offensive line that's become one of the program's staple units.

UK's ball-stopping staff remains intact from last season, but it'll trot out multiple new starters at every level of the defense. Most have played a fair number of snaps except for those in the linebacking corps, which for the second year in a row is a huge area of concern.

The Wildcats have a lot of questions to answer but have built a culture that should enable them to maintain their status as an average SEC challenger, while boasting enough talent to make things interesting if they can jell on offense.

### OFFENSE

Liam Coen said in the spring that he'd like to get running back Chris Rodriguez Jr. more than 25 touches a game, and why not? As a sophomore he averaged a league-best 6.6 yards per carry and finished fifth in the league in rushing despite splitting carries with senior A.J. Rose.

Rodriguez could have skipped his remaining eligibility and entered early into the NFL Draft but insisted on returning to become his family's first college graduate. In addition to a degree, his choice should be rewarded with a significant uptick in touches, albeit not exclusively in the run game.

"It's my job and our job as an offensive staff to find different ways for him to touch the football, as opposed to turning around and giving him the ball," Coen said. "That's something that's new, being able to free-release from the backfield and catch the football."

Kavosiey Smoke, JuTahn McClain and Travis Tisdale top a deep running back room that's likely to be a bread-winner once again for Kentucky, regardless of how the footballs come to them.

The addition of receiver Wan'Dale Robinson will make things easier for whoever's throwing the football this fall, but no one was more excited to see him come to Lexington more than Josh Ali, perhaps the most notable of five seniors who chose to take the NCAA's extra year of eligibility granted in response to COVID-19 pandemic.

He the only returning, healthy receiver who's ever caught a touchdown pass at Kentucky. Now, he has someone else to attract defenses' attention.

The "Big Blue Wall" lost multi-year starters in center Drake Jackson and offensive tackle Landon Young, but didn't collapse entirely. Senior Luke Fortner opted into an-

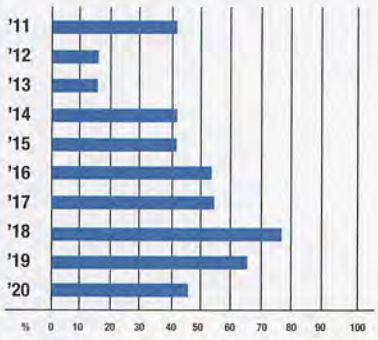
## SCHEDULE

| Date | Opponent | '20 Record |
|---|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | LOUISIANA MONROE | 0-10 |
| Sept. 11 | MISSOURI | 5-5 |
| Sept. 18 | UT CHATTANOOGA | 3-2 |
| Sept.. 25 | at South Carolina | 2-8 |
| Oct. 2 | FLORIDA | 8-4 |
| Oct. 9 | LSU | 5-5 |
| Oct. 16 | at Georgia | 8-2 |
| Oct. 30 | at Mississippi State | 4-7 |
| Nov. 6 | TENNESSEE | 3-7 |
| Nov. 13 | at Vanderbilt | 0-9 |
| Nov. 20 | NEW MEXICO STATE | 2-5 |
| Nov. 27 | at Louisville | 4-7 |

## RESULTS

| | 5-6, 4-6 | |
|---|---|---|
| L | at Auburn | 13-29 |
| L | OLE MISS | 41-42 |
| W | MISSISSIPPI STATE | 24-2 |
| W | at Tennessee | 34-7 |
| L | at Missouri | 10-20 |
| L | GEORGIA | 3-14 |
| W | VANDERBILT | 38-35 |
| L | at Alabama | 3-63 |
| L | at Florida | 10-34 |
| W | SOUTH CAROLINA | 41-18 |
| | **GATOR BOWL** | |
| W | vs. NC State | 23-21 |

## 10-YEAR WINNING TREND



## AT A GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Lexington, Ky.

**2020:** 5-6 overall, 4-6 SEC (4th, East)

**COACH:** Mark Stoops — At Kentucky and overall: 49-50, 8 years

**RETURNING STARTERS:** 11; 5 offense, 5 defense, kicker

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:**
RB Chris Rodriguez Jr., WR Wan'Dale Robinson, TE Keaton Upshaw, OT Darian Kinnard, DE Josh Paschal, LB DeAndre Square, DB Cedric Dort, S Yusuf Corker

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:**
Kentucky remains experienced at OL after getting a boost from a couple of surprise returnees, which could ensure another fine season from Rodriguez. The secondary is relatively inexperienced but is deep and flexible enough to maximize their abilities.

**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:**
QB is up in the air following the transition away from Terry Wilson, who transferred to New Mexico in part due to UK's desire to move in a new direction offensively. There are a lot of bodies at WR, but outside of a couple guys, they haven't proven anything. Another injury at LB could be a backbreaker for a defense that is otherwise stout.

**KEY LOSSES:**
QB Terry Wilson, C Drake Jackson, OT Landon Young, NG Quinton Bohanna, DT Phil Hoskins, LB Jamin Davis, DB Kelvin Joseph, DB Brandin Echols

**OVERVIEW:**
There's a lot of wonder about Kentucky as new offensive coordinator Liam Coen — late of the L.A. Rams working for Sean McVay — tries to establish a more balanced offense (once he finds a quarterback). But outside of the O-line and running backs, the Wildcats have a ton to prove. They can lean on Rodriguez and the defense (if they can avoid more injuries), but need to score more to rise.

**KEY NUMBER:**
**4** UK's average number of conference victories since 2016, the seventh-best mark in the SEC.

LT
Darian
KINNARD

Photo by Joe Robbins

RB
**Chris Rodriguez Jr.**
Photo by Joe Robbins

## SCOUTING REPORT: Offense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | Joey Gatewood | Jr. | Liam Coen's is the third offense he's had to learn in college. | Will Levis, Jr. |
| RB | Chris Rodriguez Jr. | Jr. | Was a first-team All-SEC selection by Pro Football Focus. | JuTahn McClain, So. |
| RB | Kavosiey Smoke | Jr. | Played in only seven games last year due to a lingering injury. | Travis Tisdale, So. |
| WR | **Josh Ali*** | Sr. | Opted into additional year after breaking down tape with Coen. | Demarcus Harris, So. |
| WR | Wan'Dale Robinson | Jr. | Is the No. 2 all-time scorer in Kentucky high school history. | Isaiah Epps, Sr. |
| TE | Keaton Upshaw | Jr. | Caught more touchdowns (3) than any other player last season. | **Justin Rigg, Sr.*** |
| LT | **Darian Kinnard*** | Sr. | Moving from right tackle, where he was an All-American last year. | Nick Lewis, Jr. |
| LG | Austin Dotson | Sr. | Started four games last year, played significant snaps in all 11. | **Kenneth Horsey, Jr.*** |
| C | Quintin Wilson | Jr. | Played in only 10 games; studied diligently under Drake Jackson. | Eli Cox, So. |
| RG | **Luke Fortner*** | Sr. | Was a member of the AFCA Good Works Team in 2020. | R.J. Adams, Fr. |
| RT | Jeremy Flax | So. | Lost 30 pounds ahead of the spring and is moving much faster. | Naasir Watkins, Sr. |
| PK | **Matt Ruffolo*** | Sr. | Was 22 of 23 on PATs and 12-for-14 on field-goal tries in 2020. | Chance Poore, Jr. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

## SCOUTING REPORT: Defense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | **Josh Paschal*** | Sr. | 2020 semifinalist for Witten Collegiate Man of the Year Award. | Isaiah Gibson, So. |
| DT | Marquan McCall | Sr. | OC Liam Coen has likened his physicality to Aaron Donald. | Justin Rogers, So. |
| DT | Octavious Oxendine | So. | One of five Kentuckians who graduated from North Hardin HS. | Abule Abadi-Fitzgerald, Sr. |
| LB | **Jordan Wright*** | Jr. | Started five games last year and has 33 under his belt at UK. | Justice Dingle, Jr. |
| LB | Marquez Bembry | Jr. | Recorded 10 tackles in his first college start last season. | Trevin Wallace, Fr. |
| LB | **DeAndre Square*** | Sr. | Quiet ball-stopper was more vocal on field, with media in spring. | Jared Casey, So. |
| LB | J.J. Weaver | So. | Was named to coaches' All-SEC Freshman Team last year. | K.D. McDaniel, So. |
| CB | Carrington Valentine | So. | Made first career start as a true freshman in Dec. bowl game. | Quandre Mosely, Sr. |
| CB | Cedrick Dort Jr. | Sr. | Didn't give up a TD as UK's starter in the 2019 season. | Andru Phillips, Fr. |
| SS | **Tyrell Ajian*** | Sr. | Emerged as a starter after playing spot snaps prior to last year. | Vito Tisdale, So. |
| FS | **Yusuf Corker*** | Sr. | Made starts in 24 consecutive games, most in the secondary. | Taj Dodson, So. |
| P | Wilson Berry | Fr. | Has a burger named after him at a restaurant in Australia. | Colin Goodfellow, Sr. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

other year of eligibility and senior Darian Kinnard chose to play another year instead of diving into pro waters.

Tight end Justin Rigg also opted into another year; he and speedy co-starter Keaton Upshaw should be more involved as receivers under Coen.

Three scholarship quarterbacks — junior Joey Gatewood, sophomore Beau Allen and sophomore Nik Scalzo — played throughout the spring and a fourth, Penn State transfer Will Levis, enrolled over the summer.

Gatewood looked the best in the spring, if hearsay is to be believed, but the staff was relatively tight-lipped about the position and will likely remain so until a few weeks out from Kentucky's first kickoff, after Levis has had an opportunity to practice with the team.

Quarterback battles are sometimes in name only, but this one has the makings of a genuine slugfest. For the Cats' sake, it'd be ideal if the winner is by knockout rather than decision.

## DEFENSE

Kentucky continued to make its mark as a defensive stalwart last season, even against a heavier SEC schedule.

The Alabama and Florida games not withstanding — and it's worth acknowledging those games got out of hand in large part due to the offense's inability to keep up with more potent counterparts — Kentucky appeared as strong as most teams in the country week in and week out in 2020.

The base 3-4 front will rely considerably on a defensive end (Josh Paschal), middle linebacker (DeAndre Square) and outside linebacker (Jordan Wright) who have combined for 52 starts in 109 games played.

Marquan McCall, a reserve who has played in 31 games, slots in easily at the nose guard position left open by Quinton Bohanna, but defensive tackle is somewhat up in the air. Octavious Oxendine was a true freshman last year who seemed to be the spring leader, but the starter could end up being any number of heralded youngsters recruited to the D-line.

The front three should settle in faster than the middle four, which is more diminished heading into 2021 than it already was going into last year.

Jamin Davis, who stepped up in a major fashion after likely 2020 starter Chris Oats suffered a stroke from which he continues to rehab, worked himself into being a first-round draft pick.

The linebacking corps was further diminished when D'Eryk Jackson suffered a season-ending injury in the spring. He wasn't a sure thing, but he'd been the most impressive middle backer opposite Square through early camp and was pushing for considerable playing time, if not the starting job, as a true sophomore.

Marquez Bembry probably starts opposite Square at Mike, since he's been in the program a couple seasons, but that spot is the most up in the air of any position that isn't quarterback. Jack linebacker has a ter-

## TOP 5 NFL PROSPECTS

**1. Darian Kinnard** OT 6-5 345 5.33 Sr.

The mammoth Kinnard has earned a reputation as one of the most efficient run-blocking tackles in America. Known for his great work ethic and toughness, he is a hard-nosed mauler who has played in 33 career contests, including 26 consecutive starts at tackle. This season, Kinnard is expected to assume the left tackle role for the Wildcats, moving from the right side.

He was part of an offensive line that set single-season school records with 3,624 rushing yards, 36 rushing touchdowns and 6.3 yards per carry in 2019. That same season, Kinnard was penalized just once in 706 snaps. He started all 10 games in 2020 and is a strong candidate to earn first-team All-SEC honors in 2021. While his arm length could provide him an opportunity to remain at tackle in the NFL, his frame suggests that he could ultimately slide inside as a supreme guard talent.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2. Josh Paschal** | DE | 6-3 | 278 | 4.80 | Sr. |
| **3. Yusuf Corker** | S | 6-0 | 197 | 4.57 | Sr. |
| **4. Wan'Dale Robinson** | WR | 5-11 | 185 | 4.45 | Jr. |
| **5. DeAndre Square** | ILB | 6-1 | 224 | 4.65 | Sr. |

— Ric Serritella, NFL Draft Bible

rific answer in rising star J.J. Weaver if he's able to come back swiftly from ACL surgery; otherwise that role is also a head-scratcher.

Cedrick Dort ceded a starting corner spot to NFL draftee Kelvin Joseph last year but stayed the course at Kentucky instead of jumping ship. His leadership, along with that of potential All-SEC safety Yusuf Corker, will be critical for a secondary that, pound for pound, is probably UK's most talented unit, but is about as unproven as it is special.

It's not dissimilar to where UK was following an exodus of NFL-level secondary talent in 2019. Kentucky is replacing fewer departures with more bodies, so things should sort out nicely here given the track record of secondary coaches Steve Clinkscale and Frank Buffano.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

One could certainly build a case that Max Duffy, the 2019 Ray Guy Award winner, was Kentucky's most significant departure. The star punter from Australia helped sell another former Aussie-rules pro, Wilson Berry, on coming to Lexington, so the Wildcats should continue to fare well when their offense is halted.

Back are walk-on kicker Matt Ruffolo and former walk-on Zach Johnson, a kick return specialist who's not afraid to throw a shoulder, and Chance Poore, a scholarship kicker who primarily handled kickoffs last season.

Wan'Dale Robinson might get deployed as a punt returner but there are a number of young, fast dudes to whom UK would be better served putting there.

## SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

First up for the Wildcats is a home date with Louisiana-Monroe, coached by former Auburn head man Terry Bowden. They'll follow that up with their SEC opener against Missouri, the earliest the teams have met since Mizzou joined the league.

Assuming Kentucky can make up for last season's disappointment in Columbia — it lost a five-game win streak over the Tigers after scoring just 10 points — it should be 3-0 heading (following a third straight home game, vs. Tennessee-Chattanooga) into what will be a season-defining stretch.

Over the course of four weeks, the Wildcats will travel to South Carolina, host Florida, host LSU and visit Georgia before their bye week. They've had the upper hand on the Gamecocks of late (winning six of the last seven) but are near certain to be underdogs in the final three games.

There's not a single game following the bye that Kentucky can't win, although traveling to Mississippi State on Halloween weekend prior to hosting Tennessee the next week isn't ideal. They'll close at Vanderbilt before what should be two wins — home against New Mexico State and at rival Louisville — to finish the season.

— Josh Moore

DB
**Yusuf Corker**
Photo by Mike Watters-USA TODAY Sports

### 2018 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 26.6 | 84 |
| Rushing | 199.4 | 40 |
| Passing | 161.5 | 116 |
| Total | 360.9 | 103 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 16.8 | 6 |
| Rushing | 151.6 | 51 |
| Passing | 186.3 | 18 |
| Total | 337.9 | 23 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 2 | + 0.15 | T-54 |

### 2019 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 27.2 | 76 |
| Rushing | 278.8 | 4 |
| Passing | 113.7 | 127 |
| Total | 392.5 | 76 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 19.3 | 14 |
| Rushing | 156.8 | 64 |
| Passing | 167.8 | 2 |
| Total | 324.6 | 21 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 1 | - 0.08 | T-70 |

### 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 21.8 | 107 |
| Rushing | 196.5 | 34 |
| Passing | 121.5 | 122 |
| Total | 318.0 | 115 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 25.9 | 45 |
| Rushing | 156.1 | T-53 |
| Passing | 224.6 | 54 |
| Total | 380.7 | 45 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 10 | + 0.91 | 13 |

# NOTEBOOK

Head coach **Mark Stoops** enters his ninth season with a 49-50 record. His win total is second-highest in school history, behind only **Paul "Bear" Bryant** (60-23-5 from 1946-1953).

No Kentucky coach has finished his career at the school with a winning record since **Blanton Collier**, whose eight-year tenure ended with an overall record of 41-36-3 following the 1961 season.

Stoops set a school record by guiding UK to its his fifth straight bowl appearance. His three bowl wins match the most by any Kentucky coach; that's tied with **Rich Brooks**, who also won three straight, from 2006-2008.

Among SEC schools, only **Nick Saban**, who's been in charge at Alabama since 2007, has been with his program longer than Stoops.

• Linebacker **Luke Fulton** was among the five transfers whom UK added in the offseason. He challenged for a starting spot at Michigan State ahead of the 2020 season but ultimately never played after an assault charge in East Lansing. The former four-star prospect was recruited by Kentucky out of high school and played at Cardinal Mooney High School in Ohio, Stoops' alma mater.

• Letting go of **Eddie Gran** was difficult for Stoops, but UK's former offensive coordinator harbors no ill will about the parting. "I'll always be a Kentucky fan," Gran said. "I love this place."

• In the offseason, linebackers coach **Jon Sumrall** was promoted to co-defensive coordinator, and defensive backs coach **Steve Clinkscale** became defensive passing game coordinator.

• Kentucky last year defeated Tennessee in Knoxville for the first time since 1984, its last win over the Volunteers prior to a 26-game losing streak snapped in 2011. After losing five straight following that year, UK is 2-2 against its border rival in the last four seasons.

• Louisville was scheduled to host UK last year, but the two didn't play due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the first time that's happened since they started playing annually in 1994; before that, the two hadn't played a football game since 1924. UK has won three of four and leads the overall series, 17-15.

# WILDCATS SPRING ROSTER

| Quarterback | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11 Beau Allen | QB | 6-2 | 207 | So. | Lexington |
| 17 Patrick Delahunty | QB | 6-0 | 198 | Jr. | Brecksville, OH |
| 2 Joey Gatewood | QB | 6-5 | 221 | Jr. | Jacksonville, FL |
| 16 Nik Scalzo | QB | 6-0 | 178 | So. | Fort Lauderdale, FL |
| 12 Kaiya Sheron | QB | 6-3 | 210 | Fr. | Somerset |
| **Running Back** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 26 Torrance Davis | RB | 6-2 | 220 | So. | Cleveland, OH |
| 32 Tyler Markray | RB | 5-10 | 220 | Jr. | West Bloomfield, MI |
| 17 JuTahn McClain | RB | 5-9 | 187 | So. | Fairfield, OH |
| 24 Chris Rodriguez Jr. | RB | 5-11 | 224 | Jr. | McDonough, GA |
| 20 Kavosiey Smoke | RB | 5-9 | 201 | Jr. | Wetumpka, AL |
| 33 Travis Tisdale | RB | 5-9 | 173 | So. | Andrews, SC |
| 48 Jack Varga | FB | 5-11 | 235 | Jr. | Louisville |
| 39 Dillon Wheatley | FB | 6-1 | 211 | Sr. | Richmond |
| 29 La'Vell Wright | RB | 5-11 | 202 | Fr. | Louisville |
| **Wide Receivers** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 6 Josh Ali | WR | 6-0 | 193 | Sr. | Hollywood, FL |
| 35 Kaleb Cheek | WR | 5-10 | 190 | So. | Asheboro, NC |
| 82 Tae Tae Crumes | WR | 6-1 | 192 | So. | Louisville |
| 84 Izayah Cummings | WR | 6-3 | 228 | So. | Louisville |
| 89 Allen Dailey Jr. | WR | 6-3 | 208 | Sr. | Pinson, AL |
| 5 Michael Drennen II | WR | 5-11 | 190 | So. | Dublin, OH |
| 31 Darren Edmond | WR | 5-11 | 195 | Sr. | Norman, OK |
| 81 Isaiah Epps | WR | 6-2 | 189 | Sr. | Jenks, OK |
| 86 DeMarcus Harris | WR | 6-1 | 183 | So. | Vero Beach, FL |
| 37 Luke Leeper | WR | 5-11 | 196 | So. | Louisville |
| 28 Rahsaan Lewis | WR | 5-11 | 180 | Jr. | Orlando, FL |
| 27 Chauncey Magwood | WR | 6-0 | 180 | Fr. | Leesburg, GA |
| 1 Wan'Dale Robinson | WR | 5-11 | 185 | Jr. | Frankfort |
| 13 Earnest Sanders IV | WR | 6-1 | 216 | Fr. | Beecher, MI |
| 18 Clevan Thomas Jr. | WR | 5-11 | 193 | Sr. | Miami, FL |
| **Tight Ends** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 80 Brenden Bates | TE | 6-4 | 248 | Jr. | Cincinnati, OH |
| 83 Justin Rigg | TE | 6-6 | 263 | Sr. | Springboro, OH |
| 88 Keaton Upshaw | TE | 6-6 | 245 | Jr. | Lima, OH |
| 36 Jai Williams | TE | 6-5 | 205 | Fr. | Lake Forest, IL |
| **Offensive Lineman** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 53 Reuben "R.J." Adams | OG | 6-3 | 330 | Fr. | Woodbridge, VA |
| 56 Deondre Buford | OT | 6-3 | 295 | Fr. | Detroit, MI |
| 62 Jager Burton | OL | 6-4 | 280 | Fr. | Lexington |
| 75 Eli Cox | OG | 6-4 | 293 | So. | Nicholasville |
| 61 Austin Dotson | OG | 6-6 | 313 | Sr. | Belfry |
| 77 Jeremy Flax | OL | 6-6 | 356 | So. | Detroit, MI |
| 79 Luke Fortner | OG | 6-6 | 300 | Sr. | Sylvania, OH |
| 68 Kenneth Horsey | OG | 6-3 | 300 | Jr. | Sanford, FL |
| 72 Josh Jones | OL | 6-6 | 336 | Fr. | Columbus, GA |
| 70 Darian Kinnard | OT | 6-5 | 345 | Sr. | Knoxville, TN |
| 78 Nick Lewis | OT | 6-9 | 320 | Jr. | Jacksonville. FL |
| 73 Matthew Napier | OT | 6-6 | 343 | Sr. | Nicholasville |
| 76 Jake Pope | OT | 6-7 | 291 | So. | Fort Lauderdale, FL |
| 66 Naasir Watkins | OT | 6-5 | 305 | Sr. | Laurel, MD |
| 60 Quintin Wilson | C | 6-1 | 294 | Jr. | Cincinnati, OH |
| 74 David Wohlabaugh Jr. | OL | 6-6 | 290 | Fr. | Stow, OH |
| 71 John Young | OT | 6-6 | 302 | Fr. | Louisville |
| **Defensive Lineman** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 94 Abule Abadi-Fitzgerald | DT | 6-6 | 296 | Sr. | Lakeland, FL |
| 91 Sam Anaele | DE | 6-4 | 275 | Fr. | Lagos, Nigeria |
| 63 Alex Bascom | DT | 6-5 | 272 | Jr. | Louisville |
| 64 Richard Bascom | DT | 6-5 | 269 | Jr. | Louisville |
| 98 Isaiah Beasley | DL | 5-11 | 262 | So. | Radcliff |
| 96 Isaiah Gibson | DE | 6-3 | 302 | So. | Springfield, OH |
| 69 Collin Hartmann | DE | 6-4 | 262 | Sr. | Somerset |
| 99 Josaih Hayes | DL | 6-3 | 314 | So. | Horn Lake, MS |
| 50 Marquan McCall | NG | 6-3 | 379 | Sr. | Detroit, MI |
| 8 Octavious Oxendine | DT | 6-1 | 318 | So. | Radcliff |
| 4 Josh Paschal | DE | 6-3 | 278 | Sr. | Prince George's County, MD |
| 52 Justin Rogers | DL | 6-3 | 336 | So. | Oak Park, MI |
| 90 Tre'vonn Rybka | DL | 6-4 | 310 | Fr. | Dickson, TN |
| **Linebackers** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 42 Marquez Bembry | ILB | 6-3 | 232 | Jr. | Stone Mountain, GA |
| 45 Jase Bruner | OLB | 6-2 | 232 | So. | Science Hill |
| 6 Jared Casey | ILB | 6-3 | 221 | So. | Louisville |
| 55 Justice Dingle | OLB | 6-3 | 262 | Jr. | Bowling Green |
| 46 Braxton Eiserman | ILB | 6-1 | 212 | Jr. | Jackson |
| 40 Luke Fulton | LB | 6-4 | 230 | So. | Youngstown, OH |
| 48 Cody Goatley | ILB | 6-2 | 218 | So. | Mayfield |
| 43 Darren Green | ILB | 6-1 | 218 | So. | Vine Grove |
| 56 D'Eryk Jackson | ILB | 6-1 | 245 | So. | Dublin, GA |
| 49 Shawn Lawson | OLB | 6-3 | 232 | Sr. | Jonesboro, GA |
| 47 K.D. McDaniel | OLB | 6-2 | 250 | So. | Tifton, GA |
| 38 William Nalty | ILB | 6-0 | 220 | Sr. | Metairie, LA |
| 22 Chris Oats | ILB | 6-3 | 232 | Jr. | Cincinnati, OH |
| 5 DeAndre Square | ILB | 6-1 | 224 | Sr. | Detroit, MI |
| 13 J.J. Weaver | OLB | 6-5 | 241 | So. | Louisville |
| 15 Jordan Wright | OLB | 6-5 | 233 | Jr. | Fort Lauderdale, FL |
| **Defensive Backs** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 23 Tyrell Ajian | DB | 6-0 | 190 | Sr. | Mansfield, OH |
| 24 Zac Berezowitz | DB | 6-0 | 178 | Sr. | Lexington |
| 29 Yusuf Corker | DB | 6-0 | 197 | Sr. | McDonough, GA |
| 30 Taj Dodson | DB | 6-1 | 198 | So. | Union City, GA |
| 3 Cedrick Dort Jr. | DB | 5-11 | 182 | Sr. | Palm Beach Gardens, FL |
| 11 Moses Douglass | DB | 6-2 | 199 | So. | Springfield, OH |
| 30 Ben Drake | DB | 6-1 | 199 | Jr. | Charlottesville, VA |
| 34 Jalen Geiger | DB | 6-1 | 195 | So. | Columbia, SC |
| 31 Maxwell Hairston | DB | 6-1 | 170 | Fr. | West Bloomfield, MI |
| 35 Rickey Hyatt Jr. | DB | 6-2 | 203 | Fr. | Columbus, OH |
| 28 Zach Johnson | DB | 5-10 | 193 | Sr. | Cincinnati, OH |
| 25 Jordan Lovett | DB | 6-2 | 195 | Fr. | Radcliff |
| 21 Quandre Mosely | DB | 6-2 | 185 | Sr. | Brunswick, GA |
| 37 Andru Phillips | DB | 5-11 | 180 | Fr. | Mauldin, SC |
| 9 Davonte Robinson | DB | 6-2 | 213 | Sr. | Lexington |
| 7 Vito Tisdale | S | 6-1 | 200 | So. | Bowling Green |
| 14 Carrington Valentine | DB | 6-0 | 200 | So. | Cincinnati, OH |
| 27 Joel Williams | DB | 6-1 | 204 | So. | Baton Rouge, LA |
| **Specialist** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 93 Wilson Berry | P | 6-4 | 193 | Fr. | Maribyrnong, AUS |
| 51 Cade Degraw | LS | 5-11 | 210 | Jr. | Lake Cormorant, MS |
| 94 Colin Goodfellow | P | 6-2 | 233 | Sr. | Cleveland, OH |
| 54 Jordan Morrow | LS | 6-1 | 224 | Jr. | Louisville |
| 55 Clay Perry | LS | 6-0 | 203 | So. | Upton |
| 12 Chance Poore | K | 6-2 | 208 | Jr. | Anderson, SC |
| 96 Matt Ruffolo | K | 5-11 | 205 | Sr. | Centerville, OH |
| 97 Graham Wald | K | 6-0 | 170 | So. | Lexington |

# OPPOSING COACHES VIEW

• "I'm a big fan of Mark Stoops. I think he does as good a job as anybody in the SEC given his circumstances. Coach Stoops represents the university the right way; his players represent the right way and they play hard. Kentucky fans fill up the stadium. At Kentucky, as long as you put a product on the field the fans are proud of, you're in good shape. Because it is not an easy job. It's not a good football state. The best athletes play basketball. . . .

• "Last year was a disappointment. They were not what they thought they'd be on offense. (Former coordinator) Eddie Gran did a really good job for three or four years, but as the head coach, you've got to make some tough decisions. Stoops had enough intelligence and judgment to make that change. When you're the coordinator, the quarterback play comes on you. And the quarterback play hasn't been good enough."

# INDIVIDUAL STATS

**PASSING**

| NAME | GP | Effic | Cmp | Att | Int | Pct | Yards | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| T. Wilson | 10 | 119.9 | 125 | 200 | 4 | 62.5 | 1187 | 7 | 40 | 118.7 |
| J. Gatewood | 7 | 69.0 | 17 | 35 | 1 | 48.6 | 109 | 0 | 12 | 15.6 |

**RECEIVING**

| RECEIVING | GP | No. | Yards | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| J. Ali | 11 | 54 | 473 | 8.8 | 1 | 33 | 43.0 |
| K. Upshaw | 11 | 16 | 198 | 12.4 | 3 | 23 | 18.0 |
| J. Rigg | 9 | 12 | 145 | 12.1 | 1 | 36 | 16.1 |

**RUSHING**

| RUSHING | GP | Att. | Gain | Loss | Net | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| C. Rodriguez | 9 | 119 | 794 | 9 | 785 | 6.6 | 11 | 79 | 87.2 |
| A. Rose | 11 | 106 | 677 | 11 | 666 | 6.3 | 2 | 72 | 60.6 |
| T. Wilson | 10 | 104 | 531 | 107 | 424 | 4.1 | 5 | 51 | 42.4 |

**DEF. LEADERS**

Tackles: J. Davis 102, Y. Corker 77, D. Square 60
Tackles for loss: J. Watson 10, J.J. Weaver 6.5, J. Paschal 6.5
Sacks: J. Watson 5, J. Wright 3.5, J. Davis 1.5
Interceptions: K. Joseph 4, J. Davis 3, Y. Corker 2, seven tied with 1

# 247SPORTS WILDCATS RECRUITING 2021

## 3 NEWCOMERS OF IMPACT

### Wan'Dale Robinson

The Nebraska transfer is electric with the ball in his hands. Although small in stature, the Kentucky native is not afraid to put his body on the line. Robinson's skill set allows new offensive coordinator Liam Coen to be creative with his play-calling.

### Chauncey Magwood

Magwood is a former high school quarterback with a solid foundation on how to run routes. He possesses elite speed and burst that will make him difficult to defend in and out of routes. With more than a few wide receivers transferring, there is ample early opportunity for Magwood.

### Will Levis

The Penn State transfer was looking for a fresh start and a chance to display his talent at the highest level. He found that opportunity in Lexington. Levis is a dual-threat quarterback with a strong arm. His decision-making and understanding of defenses will ultimately determine his success.

## SLEEPER

### Maxwell Hairston

Kentucky lost some valuable pieces to the draft at cornerback and that production will need to be picked up elsewhere. Hairston is a player with length and great ball skills. It would not be a surprise to see him find a spot in the rotation early.

## 2022 NEEDS

Kentucky added three new assistants on offense and those coaches will need to add players that fit their vision at each position. Offensive line, tight end and wide receiver should be points of emphasis. The secondary is scheduled to lose several players after the coming season and they will need to be replaced. UK needs to add the high-end pass rush ability that they have lacked since the likes of Josh Allen, Bud Dupree and Za'Darius Smith departed.

— Josh Edwards, 247Sports

## 247SPORTS COMPOSITE

| 0 | 6 | 15 | 0 |
|---|---|---|---|
| ✪✪✪✪✪ | ✪✪✪✪ | ✪✪✪ | ✪✪ |

| | |
|---|---|
| Committments | 21 |
| Average Stars | 3.29 |
| Total Stars | 69 |
| National Rank: 34 | SEC: 12 |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Wilson Berry** | P | 6-4 | 193 | ✪✪✪ | Maribyrnong, AUS | Maribyrnong College |

247Sports.com rated No. 7 punter nationally and No. 3 player in Australia… Played three years Australian Rules football.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Jager Burton** | OL | 6-4 | 280 | ✪✪✪✪ | Lexington | Frederick Douglass |

Ranked No. 66 player nationally and No. 1 player in Kentucky by 247Sports.com… Helped team to 14-1 record and state runner-up as a junior.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Dekel Crowdus, Jr.** | WR | 5-10 | 170 | ✪✪✪✪ | Lexington | Frederick Douglass |

247Sports.com rated No. 51 wide receiver nationally and No. 3 player in Kentucky… Had 91 career receptions for 1,505 yards and 22 touchdowns… As a senior, had 25 receptions for 331 yards and nine touchdowns, averaging 13 yards per reception… Had 37 receptions for 831 yards as a sophomore.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Jordan Dingle** | TE | 6-4 | 240 | ✪✪✪ | Bowling Green | Bowling Green |

Ranked among Top 25 tight ends nationally and No. 5 player in Kentucky by 247Sports.com… Had 36 receptions for 473 yards and two touchdowns as a senior, averaging 13.1 yards per reception… As a junior, had 35 receptions for 474 yards and five touchdowns.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Justice Dingle** | OLB | 6-3 | 262 | ✪✪✪ | Bowling Green | Georgia Tech |

Played two seasons (19 games) and had eight tackles, including one tackle for loss, and three fumbles caused.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Jamarius Dinkins** | DL | 6-5 | 255 | ✪✪✪ | Columbus, OH | Walnut Ridge |

As a senior, had 43 tackles, including 12 tackles for loss, eight quarterback sacks and four fumbles caused.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Luke Fulton** | LB | 6-4 | 230 | ✪✪✪✪ | Youngstown, OH | Michigan State |

Did not play in 2020… 247Sports.com rated No. 9 player in Ohio out of high school… Had 98 tackles, including 16 tackles for loss, and three quarterback sacks as a senior in 2018… As a junior, had 135 tackles, six quarterback sacks and eight fumbles caused.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Maxwell Hairston** | DB | 6-1 | 170 | ✪✪✪ | West Bloomfield, MI | West Bloomfield |

Ranked No. 65 cornerback nationally and No. 19 player in Michigan by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had 23 tackles, 15 passes broken up, two interceptions and three fumbles caused… Had 500 yards receiving and five touchdowns.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Adrian Huey** | DB | 6-0 | 180 | ✪✪✪ | Nashville, TN | Hillsboro |

247Sports.com rated No. 72 cornerback nationally and No. 23 player in Tennessee… Had 17 tackles, five passes broken up and zero touchdowns allowed in seven games as a senior… Did not allow a touchdown reception as a junior.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Christian Lewis** | WR | 6-4 | 190 | ✪✪✪✪ | Pleasant Grove, AL | Pleasant Grove |

Ranked Top 10 player in Alabama by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had 70 receptions for 1,235 yards and 18 touchdowns, averaging 17.6 yards per reception… Helped team to two consecutive state championship games in 2019 and 2020… Had 75 receptions for 1,398 yards and 20 touchdowns as a junior.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Jordan Lovett** | DB | 6-2 | 195 | ✪✪✪ | Radcliff | North Hardin |

247Sports.com rated No. 38 safety nationally and No. 4 player in Kentucky… As a junior, had 15 interceptions in his first season at safety.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Chauncey Magwood** | WR | 6-0 | 180 | ✪✪✪ | Leesburg, GA | Lee County |

Started every game in high school (56), helping team to two state championships… Switched to quarterback and had 633 yards passing and seven touchdowns as a senior… Had 433 yards rushing and five touchdowns… Had 11 receptions for 141 yards and two touchdowns… As a junior, had 53 receptions for 700 yards and 10 touchdowns… Helped team to two consecutive state championships in freshman and sophomore seasons.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Wan'Dale Robinson** | WR | 5-11 | 185 | ✪✪✪✪ | Frankfort | Nebraska |

Due to COVID eligibility extension, will have three years eligibility remaining… As a freshman in 2019, had 40 receptions for 443 yards and two touchdowns… Had 340 yards rushing and three touchdowns… Had 1,029 all-purpose yards.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Paul Rodriguez** | OL | 6-3 | 310 | ✪✪✪ | Mason, OH | William Mason |

247Sports.com rated among Top 60 offensive tackles nationally.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Devonte Ross** | WR | 6-0 | 170 | ✪✪✪ | Cartersville, GA | Cartersville |

Had 115 career receptions for 2,389 yards and 29 touchdowns, averaging 20.8 yards per reception… Had 32 receptions for 733 yards and 10 touchdowns as a senior, averaging 22.9 yards per reception… Had 16 tackles, including two tackles for loss, 11 passes broken up, one interception and one fumble caused… As a junior, had 53 receptions for 1,077 yards and 12 touchdowns.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Kahlil Saunders** | DL | 6-5 | 270 | ✪✪✪ | Huntsville, AL | Grissom |

Ranked a Top 50 strongside defensive end by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had 80 tackles, including 14 tackles for loss, eight quarterback sacks, and 17 quarterback hurries.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Kaiya Sheron** | QB | 6-3 | 210 | ✪✪✪ | Somerset | Somerset |

247Sports.com rated No. 21 pro-style quarterback nationally and Top 10 player in Kentucky… Led team to 14-1 record and state championship as a junior… Had 3,218 yards passing and 28 touchdowns… Had 959 yards rushing and nine touchdowns.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Martez Thrower** | LB | 6-2 | 212 | ✪✪✪ | Rochelle, GA | Wilcox County |

Ranked No. 38 outside linebacker nationally and No. 54 player in Georgia by 247Sports.com.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Trevin Wallace** | LB | 6-23 | 220 | ✪✪✪✪ | Jesup, GA | Wayne County |

247Sports.com rated No. 35 player and No. 2 inside linebacker nationally and No. 6 player in Georgia… As a senior, had 96 tackles, including 12 tackles for loss, five quarterback sacks, three fumbles caused and one interception… Had 910 yards rushing and seven touchdowns on 78 carries… Had 10 receptions for 79 yards.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **David Wohlabaugh** | OL | 6-6 | 290 | ✪✪✪ | Stow, OH | Walsh Jesuit |

Ranked No. 67 tackle nationally and No. 25 player in Ohio by 247Sports.com.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **La'Vell Wright** | RB | 5-11 | 202 | ✪✪✪ | Radcliff | North Hardin |

247Sports.com rated No. 51 running back nationally and No. 7 player in Kentucky… Had more than 4,000 yards rushing and 53 touchdowns in final three seasons… As a senior, had 884 yards rushing and 11 touchdowns in seven games… Had 1,819 yards rushing and 25 touchdowns as a junior.

# PLAYER PROFILE

## Robinson Seizing Opportunity in UK Return

Wan'Dale Robinson came to Kentucky wanting to earn an opportunity, not be given one. Make no mistake about it, though: if things go as the Wildcats' hope on offense, he'll be a star, if not *the* brightest of a more balanced attack.

Robinson made a name for himself as Nebraska's top receiver and one of its best offensive weapons, overall, in each of the last two seasons. He amassed nearly 1,500 yards with the Cornhuskers before entering the transfer portal in January.

He was quickly linked to Kentucky for good reason: it was the Wildcats whom he spurned in his original recruitment. A former Mr. Football winner out of Western Hills High School in Frankfort, the state's capital, Robinson originally committed to UK but flipped to Nebraska a couple weeks out from the start of the early signing period. He put pen to paper and ended up in Lincoln.

Recruiting coordinator Vince Marrow has said repeatedly that maintaining positive relationships, whether players ultimately pick Kentucky or not, is crucial, and that'll be even truer going forward in the new transfer climate. Robinson's de-commitment was one that cut deep, but there were no hard feelings between the parties.

"I think that was just me being young and under a lot of pressure from a lot of different people, pulling me from all different sides," Robinson said during the spring.

"I think that's what people sometimes forget, the pressure I was put under during that time, people wanting me to go to a certain school and that kind of thing, and being from Kentucky."

Robinson joins a UK program that's played in five straight postseasons and won its past three bowl games; Nebraska didn't qualify for the postseason in either of his two seasons there.

He also joins a belabored receiving corps that returns only one healthy player (Josh Ali) who's caught a touchdown pass in a Kentucky uniform. Only two UK players — running backs Chris Rodriguez and Kavosiey Smoke — have scored more TDs than Robinson in their college careers.

As the Wildcats attempt to bring their passing game closer to where their rushing game has been over the past three seasons, Robinson will be a reliable weapon for whoever lines up under center. His homecoming has brought much elation to a fan base eager for more production in the receiving corps. If he can meet their expectations, Kentucky should be sitting pretty by the end of 2021.

WR
WAN'DALE ROBINSON
Photo by Jeffrey Becker-USA TODAY Sports

For more coverage visit lindyssports.com/college-football/sec/kentucky

# BEST AND BRIGHTEST

## MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

### RB CHRIS RODRIGUEZ

He positioned himself as UK's top running back in 2020 despite taking a backseat to senior A.J. Rose on the depth chart. He rushed for team highs of 785 yards and 11 touchdowns despite missing two of UK's games due to COVID-19 protocols. … Has the build and burst to be a potential NFL draftee next April if his production continues to match, or exceeds, where it's been his first two seasons as a reserve.

## EMERGING STAR

### DB VITO TISDALE

He is the most dynamic athlete in a Kentucky defensive backfield loaded with potential stars. A product of Bowling Green High School, located in the state's Pennyrile region, the 6-1, 200-pound safety played in 10 games, and at times was often featured — and shined — as a Jack linebacker. He had 20 tackles as a true freshman last year. … Tisdale's father, also named Vito, was a frontman, dubbed "Big V," of the Grammy-nominated hip-hop group Nappy Roots.

## TOP NEWCOMER

### WR WAN'DALE ROBINSON

If things go as the Wildcats hope on offense, the native of Frankfort, Ky., could become the brightest star of a more balanced attack. … He amassed nearly 1,500 yards with the Cornhuskers before transferring in January. … Another to watch: LB Trevin Wallace, who signed with UK over Auburn and Florida State. He was a top-150 recruit and could play right away in a beleaguered linebacking corps.

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# LSU TIGERS

For more coverage of the Tigers, visit lsu.247Sports.com

**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Jake Peetz **DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Daronte Jones **STADIUM:** Tiger Stadium: 102,321

## THAT WAS JUST A SPEED BUMP, WASN'T IT?

Now more than a year removed from their 2019 national championship glory, the LSU Tigers' seemingly endless 2020 collection of misadventures remains an open wound, and now they start from here.

Where "here" is can be tricky to define.

Either way, last season's depressing campaign — which reached the break-even point only by the grace of dramatic comebacks in the last two games — led coach Ed Orgeron to make significant changes to try to regain the lost momentum.

Orgeron fired highly regarded, veteran assistants Bo Pelini and Scott Linehan, who had been on his staff for just one season as defensive coordinator and passing game coordinator. Third-year safeties coach Bill Busch was axed, as well.

Also, veteran offensive coordinator Steve Ensminger and defensive line coach Bill Johnson remained with Orgeron as analysts, but both retired from the coaching staff.

Orgeron looked to the NFL to find defensive coordinator Daronte Jones and defensive line coach Andre Carter, and he hired linebackers coach Blake Baker away from the University of Miami, where he had been defensive coordinator.

In what amounts to a youth movement, the average age of LSU's coaches dropped 20 years.

"I'm the old man on the staff now," said Orgeron, who turns 60 in late July.

Orgeron also added a general manager in Austin Thomas, in part to give himself time to pay more attention to a defense that suffered the worst statistical season in school history.

Besides accepting his input, Orgeron said the new hires bring a fresh perspective toward player relations. Orgeron encountered criticism for the manner in which he addressed the players' concerns toward societal issues last season.

"These guys are young guys," Orgeron said of his new coaches. "They can relate to our players."

The youthful coaches will be working with a roster with some veteran personnel. The entire offensive and defensive lines return, in part benefitting from the NCAA's decision not to count the pandemic-crossed season against a player's eligibility.

Also back are the quarterbacks who opened and ended the season as starting quarterback. Myles Brennan started the first three games but won only one before an abdominal injury sidelined him. And Max Johnson assumed control for the final two games and threw for six touchdown passes while leading the team to the comeback victories over Florida and Ole Miss.

In between the two, TJ Finley held down the starting job, and when he didn't regain the position from Johnson in the spring, he announced he would be transferring out.

## OFFENSE

If the foundation of any offense is its line, then LSU has plenty on which to build. All five starters return from last season, including four seniors. Granted, the line's performance was often questionable, but there's no substitute for experience, and the Tigers have plenty of that for new offensive coordinator Jake Peetz, who was running backs coach of the Carolina Panthers when Orgeron hired him.

Senior center Liam Shanahan, last year's Harvard transfer, played every offensive snap. Senior right tackle Austin Deculus is a four-year starter and the only remaining member of the 2019 national-championship unit that won the Joe Moore Award as college's top offensive line.

Add in senior left guard Ed Ingram, junior left tackle Dare Rosenthal and others, and the Tigers have a unit that may well atone for many of last year's deficiencies.

"Everyone from the offensive line, since day one, they all have improved tremendously," Deculus said in the spring. "You just feed off the person next to you."

Certainly, LSU has plenty on which to improve, given that it allowed 25 sacks and didn't have a 1,000-yard rusher for the first time since 2012. But the line did show progress, particularly after allowing seven sacks in a disastrous season opener that erased LSU's No. 5 preseason ranking.

Brennan bore the brunt of that pound-

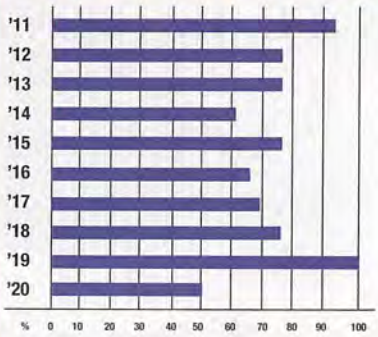
## SCHEDULE

| Date | Opponent | '20 Record |
|---|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | at UCLA | 3-4 |
| Sept. 11 | McNEESE STATE | 3-4 |
| Sept. 18 | CENTRAL MICHIGAN | 3-3 |
| Sept. 25 | at Mississippi State | 4-7 |
| Oct. 2 | AUBURN | 6-5 |
| Oct. 9 | at Kentucky | 5-6 |
| Oct. 16 | FLORIDA | 8-4 |
| Oct. 23 | at Ole Miss | 5-5 |
| Nov. 6 | at Alabama | 13-0 |
| Nov. 13 | ARKANSAS | 3-7 |
| Nov. 20 | LOUISIANA MONROE | 0-10 |
| Nov. 27 | TEXAS A&M | 9-1 |

## RESULTS

| 5-5, 5-5 | | |
|---|---|---|
| L | MISSISSIPPI STATE | 34-44 |
| W | at Vanderbilt | 41-7 |
| L | at Missouri | 41-45 |
| W | SOUTH CAROLINA | 52-24 |
| L | at Auburn | 11-48 |
| W | at Arkansas | 27-24 |
| L | at Texas A&M | 7-20 |
| L | ALABAMA | 17-55 |
| W | at Florida | 37-34 |
| W | OLE MISS | 53-48 |

## 10-YEAR WINNING TREND



## AT A GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Baton Rouge, La.

**2020:** 5-5 overall, 5-5 SEC (4th, West)

**COACH:** Ed Orgeron — At LSU: 45-14, 5 years; overall: 61-41, 9 years

**RETURNING STARTERS:** 17; 7 offense, 9 defense, kicker

### PLAYERS TO WATCH:

WR Kayshon Boutte, C Liam Shanahan, OG Anthony Deculus, DE Ali Gaye, LB Damone Clark, CB Derek Stingley Jr., CB Eli Ricks, PK Cade York

### PRIMARY STRENGTHS:

Maturity and experience abound. LSU has gifted athletes throughout the lineup, including WR Boutte and CB Stingley. They — and numerous others — will be counted on to tilt the field in the Tigers' favor at any moment.

### POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:

Adapting to five new coaches could make for a sizeable learning curve. The first-year coordinators inherit units that struggled more than any other since LSU's last losing season in 1999. Among their tasks are the restoration of a rushing attack and the revitalization of a porous defense.

### KEY LOSSES:

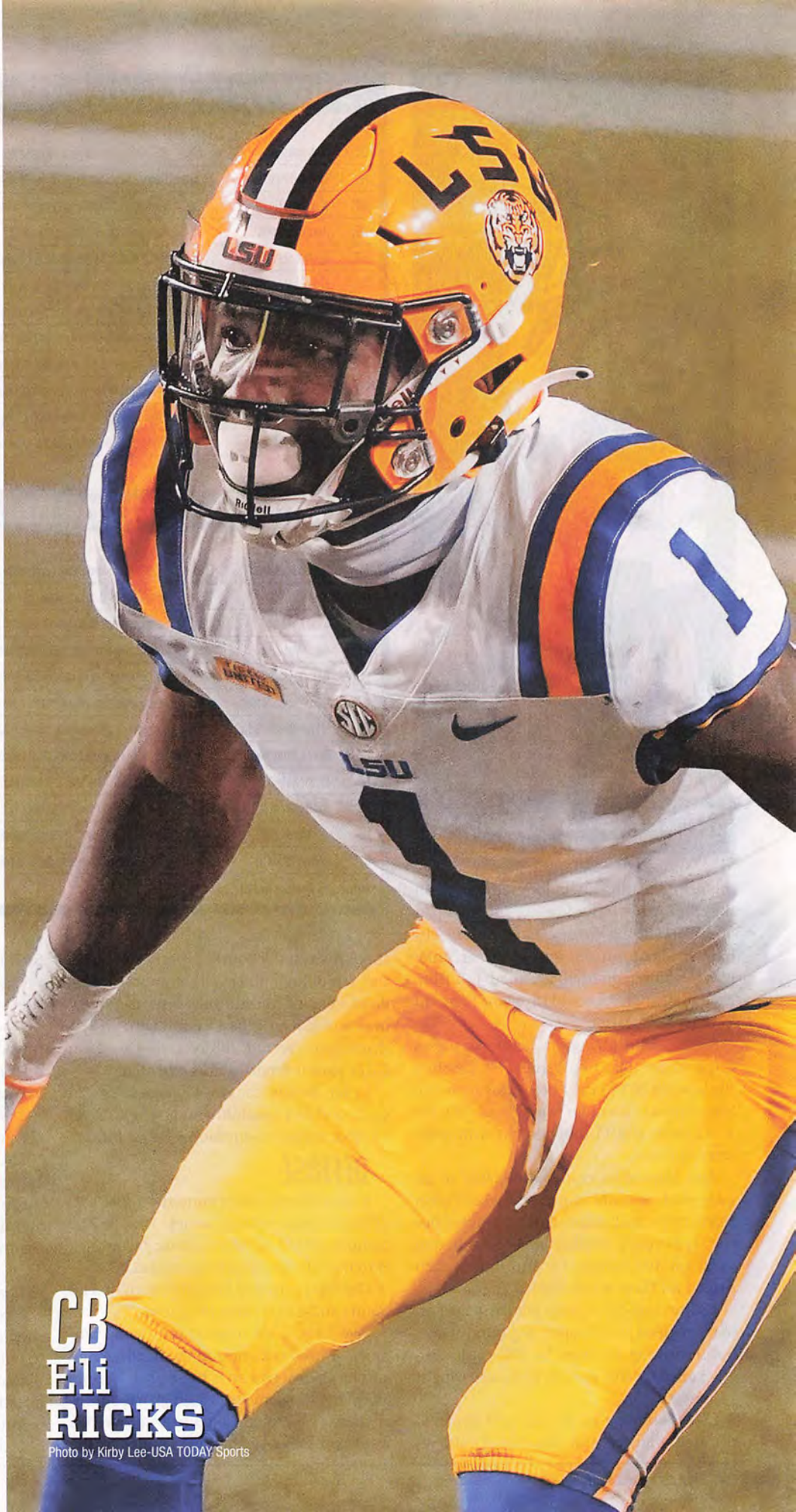
RB Chris Curry, WR Racey McMath, TE Tory Carter, LB Jabril Cox, S Jacoby Stevens, S Maurice Hampton

### OVERVIEW:

When LSU opens the season at UCLA in the Rose Bowl it will be just 20 months since Ed Orgeron fielded what many observers call the greatest college football team ever. Yet the Tigers find themselves having to bounce back from a collapse in which opponents averaged more than a touchdown per quarter. They have the talent to contend again in the SEC with a host of returnees and a fresh outlook engineered by the newcomers on the coaching staff.

### KEY NUMBER:

**20** The number of returnees who saw action in all 10 games last season. Spearheading the group is senior center Liam Shanahan, who participated in every one of the team's 799 offensive snaps.




CB
Eli
RICKS

Photo by Kirby Lee-USA TODAY Sports

CB

**Derek Stingley Jr.**

Photo by Christopher Hanewinckel-USA TODAY Sports

## SCOUTING REPORT: Offense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | Max Johnson | So. | SEC Offensive Player of Week after upset of Florida. | Myles Brennan, Sr. |
| RB | Tyrion Davis-Price | Jr. | Rushed for team-high 76 yards in spring game. | John Emery, Jr. |
| **WR** | **Kayshon Boutte*** | So. | Exceeded 100 receiving yards in last three games. | Jontre Kirklin, Sr. |
| **WR** | **Jaray Jenkins*** | Jr. | Registered game-winning, 13-yard TD catch against Arkansas. | Trey Palmer, Jr. |
| WR | Devonta Lee | Jr. | Returns to WR after stints at LB and TE. | Koy Moore, So. |
| TE | Kole Taylor | So. | His tossed shoe led to game-winning FG at Florida. | Jack Beck, Fr. |
| **LT** | **Dare Rosenthal*** | **Jr.** | Last of the offensive linemen to announce his return. | Cameron Wire, Jr. |
| **LG** | **Ed Ingram*** | **Sr.** | Announced his highly anticipated return in a tweet. | Kardell Thomas, So. |
| **C** | **Liam Shanahan*** | **Sr.** | Massachusetts native worked on Fenway Park grounds crew. | Charles Turner, So. |
| **RG** | **Anthony Bradford*** | So. | Powerful athlete with good feet, massive size. | Chasen Hines, Sr. |
| **RT** | **Austin Deculus*** | Sr. | Predicts LSU will have country's top offensive line. | Garrett Dellinger, Fr. |
| **PK** | **Cade York*** | Jr. | Made both AP and FWAA All-America second teams. | Avery Atkins, Sr. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

## SCOUTING REPORT: Defense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **DE** | **Andre Anthony*** | Sr. | Established himself after overcoming injuries early in career. | BJ Ojulari, So. |
| **DT** | **Neil Farrell*** | Sr. | Announced his return same day as teammate Ali Gaye. | Joseph Evans, So. |
| **DT** | **Glen Logan*** | Sr. | Bounced back strong after missing first two games. | Maason Smith, Fr. |
| **DE** | **Ali Gaye*** | Sr. | Junior college transfer whose offseason work paid dividends. | Soni Fonua, Sr. |
| **LB** | **Damone Clark*** | Sr. | Hometown product who is the voice of optimism. | Mike Jones, So. |
| LB | Navonteque Strong | So. | Quiet performer whose deeds have spoken volumes. | Josh White, So. |
| **LB** | **Micah Baskerville*** | Sr. | Consistency and steadying influence have been his trademark. | Antoine Sampah, So. |
| **CB** | **Derek Stingley Jr.*** | Jr. | Last season's injuries did nothing to diminish high expectations. | Cordale Flott, Jr. |
| **CB** | **Eli Ricks*** | So. | Another in a long line of premier LSU cornerbacks. | Sage Ryan, Fr. |
| **SS** | **Todd Harris Jr.*** | Sr. | Made the SEC Academic Honor Roll in 2018. | Jordan Toles, So. |
| FS | Jay Ward | Jr. | Had 29 tackles and three interceptions last season. | Cameron Lewis, Sr. |
| P | Peyton Todd | Fr. | Highly touted prospect who also prepped at linebacker. | Avery Atkins, Sr. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

ing before tearing an abdominal muscle in the third game. After leading LSU to a pair of season-ending victories, sophomore left-hander Max Johnson, son of former Super Bowl-winning quarterback Brad Johnson, gave indication he could supplant Brennan as this year's starter.

Six of Johnson's eight touchdown passes came in the last two games. He finished the year 88 of 150 for 1,069 yards with one interception. Brennan was 79 of 131 for 1,112 yards and 11 touchdowns with three interceptions.

Also hoping to reap the benefits of an improved line are running backs Tyrion Davis-Price and John Emery. Davis-Price was last year's leading rusher with 446 yards on 104 carries. He and Emery each rushed for three touchdowns.

LSU averaged 3.3 yards per carry and often struggled to establish a ground game, but in rushing 75 times for 378 yards, Emery gained 5 yards per carry. He also caught 14 passes.

LSU's receiving corps has been depleted through transfer and the NFL Draft, although Kayshon Boutte promises to make the rebuilding process that much easier. Boutte exploded onto the scene as a freshman and saved his best for last with an SEC single-game record 308 receiving yards in LSU's season-finale against Ole Miss.

In all, Boutte caught 45 passes for 735 yards and five touchdowns, giving LSU yet another reason to envision a better future.

## DEFENSE

Just as its offensive counterpart, the LSU defensive line returns intact. Despite the damning 2020 statistics, senior tackle Neil Farrell envisions better days ahead.

The Tigers allowed school records of 34.9 points and 492.0 yards per game.

"We have a lot more things to accomplish," Farrell said, noting the linemen met among themselves after the season, "so we all decided to come back and give it another shot. … We've got a point to prove. We want to be one of the best D-lines in the SEC, if not the country."

Orgeron brought in Daronte Jones from the Minnesota Vikings staff to retool the 4-3 scheme that the departed Bo Pelini introduced last season. Jones has stressed understanding and preparation, he said, so as to allow the players' athleticism to show.

"Everything starts up front," Farrell said. "He lets us go."

LSU certainly has four athletic seniors in Farrell, tackle Glen Logan and ends Andre Anthony and Ali Gaye. Anthony registered a team-high 5.5 sacks last season, while Gaye returns as the group's top tackler with 32. Gaye also recorded an interception. Farrell had a sack among his 24 tackles.

Farrell said last season "put a chip on our shoulder" that a unified front four is eager to remove.

"Since I've been here since 2017, this is the closest we've ever been as a unit," he said.

Jones wants to see that across the board in a defense that he said must "minimize

## TOP 5 NFL PROSPECTS

**1. Derek Stingley Jr. CB 6-1 195 4.40 Jr.**

Last season as a sophomore, Stingley saw a significant drop on the stat sheet at LSU … and that is OK. The reason why is that teams simply stopped targeting the cornerback, who is one of the best — if not the best — cover corners in all of college football. He gets inside of routes well, reads and reacts among the best and thrives on physical contact in his press coverage. Stingley owns tremendous instincts as a ballhawk and is a sure-fire tackler in the open field.

He had 27 total tackles and five passes defended last year, showing blanket cover skills. As a true freshman, he had 38 tackles and 15 passes defended. The son of Derek Stingley, who played professional football and minor-league baseball; his grandfather also played in the NFL. A consensus All-American in his own right, Stingley could very well be a top 10 selection in the 2022 NFL Draft.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2. Ali Gaye** | **DE** | **6-6** | **262** | **4.79** | **Sr.** |
| **3. Ed Ingram** | **OG** | **6-3** | **315** | **5.25** | **Sr.** |
| **4. Cordale Flott** | **CB** | **6-1** | **165** | **4.52** | **Jr.** |
| **5. John Emery Jr.** | **RB** | **5-11** | **215** | **4.44** | **Jr.** |

— Ric Serritella, NFL Draft Bible

mental errors. That's the first thing we want to focus on … so everyone's on the same page."

That's also the goal of the linebackers, who were somewhat stymied in the spring when senior Micah Baskerville skipped practice to focus on academics. Last season's late surge showed the importance of Baskerville's presence, particularly since he registered 55 tackles.

Senior linebacker Damone Clark returns as LSU's top returning tackler, and filling the third linebacker spot may well be Navonteque Strong, a highly touted transfer from Mississippi Gulf Coast CC.

Long known for its prowess in the defensive backfield, LSU boasts of another stellar cornerback duo. After battling injuries, junior Derek Stingley Jr. is primed to join forces with emerging sophomore cornerback Eli Ricks in maintaining LSU's well-founded reputation. Ricks had a team-high four interceptions as a freshman.

The safeties aren't as proven. Todd Harris seems fully recovered from an ACL injury, while Jay Ward gained notice with his play in the spring.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Cade York gave notice with his school-record 57-yard field goal into a thick fog with 23 seconds left to beat Florida. Beyond that, York made five other field goals of 50 yards or more. In all, he converted on 18 of 21 field goal tries and all 36 PATs.

Also back are return specialists Trey Palmer and Derek Stingley Jr. Palmer's 93-yard kickoff return for a touchdown against South Carolina was the first for LSU in Tiger Stadium since 1980. For the season, he averaged 24.7 yards on his six other kick returns. Stingley averaged 16.2 yards on his six punt returns.

Replacing punter Zach Van Rosenberg, who started for nearly four years, will be no easy task, although freshman Peyton Todd offers the promise of a seamless transition.

### 2018 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 32.4 | 37 |
| Rushing | 173.6 | 59 |
| Passing | 228.5 | 66 |
| Total | 402.1 | 68 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 21.8 | 26 |
| Rushing | 138.6 | T-34 |
| Passing | 200.1 | 38 |
| Total | 338.7 | 25 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| +12 | +0.92 | T-7 |

### 2019 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 48.4 | 1 |
| Rushing | 166.9 | 60 |
| Passing | 401.6 | 2 |
| Total | 568.5 | 1 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 21.9 | 32 |
| Rushing | 120.8 | 21 |
| Passing | 222.7 | 59 |
| Total | 343.5 | 31 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 10 | + 0.67 | T-15 |

### 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 32.0 | 39 |
| Rushing | 121.7 | 109 |
| Passing | 312.2 | 15 |
| Total | 433.9 | 35 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 34.9 | T-98 |
| Rushing | 169.0 | 67 |
| Passing | 323.0 | 127 |
| Total | 492.0 | 124 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 9 | + 0.90 | 15 |

**RB Tyrion Davis-Price**

Photo by Nelson Chenault-USA TODAY Sports

## SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

After opening the season Sept. 4 in the Rose Bowl with its first-ever meeting with UCLA, LSU will return home to face familiar competition on Sept. 11. It's not enough that in-state foe McNeese State will provide the opposition, but coach Ed Orgeron's son, Cody, is the Cowboys' starting quarterback, and former LSU assistant Frank Wilson is their head coach.

LSU follows that with another home non-conference game against Central Michigan before SEC play begins Sept. 25 at Mississippi State. In all, LSU plays seven home games and five on the road.

In the Oct. 2 home opener, LSU will look to atone for an embarrassing 48-11 loss to Auburn. The Tigers' final road game comes Nov. 6 at defending national-champion Alabama.

— David Moormann

# NOTEBOOK

In the wake of offseason reports about sexual misconduct in the program, and LSU's response to it, school officials vowed to remove former running back **Derrius Guice**'s statistics from the record book and indefinitely ban him from the athletic department.

Guice played for the Tigers from 2015-17, finishing as the Tigers' fifth all-time leading rusher with 3,074 yards. He ranked seventh in rushing touchdowns with 29.

LSU also ended its 80-year association with Taylor Porter, the Louisiana law firm that conducted the initial 2013 investigation into LSU's alleged misdeeds. The law firm of **Husch Blackwell** was subsequently hired and released an independent review last spring that detailed the extent of the circumstances.

Two women accused Guice of raping them in 2016. The report also cited former coach Les Miles for inappropriate sexual behavior.

• Former All-SEC safety **Ryan Clark**, who enjoyed a 13-year NFL career, signed a multi-year extension with ESPN. Clark has worked for the cable sports network as a studio analyst since 2015.

In addition, Clark devotes much of his time to sickle cell awareness, treatment and research. During Clark's NFL career, sickle cell led to a blood disorder with his spleen. He created Ryan Clark's Cure League in 2012 to address sickle cell disease.

A graduate of Archbishop Shaw in Marrero, La., Clark started 36 consecutive games over three seasons for LSU and helped the Tigers to the 2002 SEC championship.

• In promoting **Tam Davis** to Director of Player Relations, LSU made her only the second woman to hold that title in the SEC. Davis previously served as coordinator of defensive operations. A 2002 graduate of Southern in microbiology, Davis has worked at LSU for 15 years (starting as an intern in the recruiting department).

Among other duties, Davis will act as a liaison between the players and the campus community.

• Tiger Stadium will be open to full capacity at games this fall after COVID-19 restrictions severely limited attendance last season. Tiger Stadium seats 102,321. School officials announced that all university outdoor sporting events would be open to full capacity. Furthermore, masks will no longer be required.

## OPPOSING COACHES VIEW

• "I think LSU is a dumpster fire. (AD) Scott Woodward will get stuff cleaned up. He won't tolerate what's been going on. They need to clean house. …

• "(Defensive coordinator) Bo Pelini was a horrible hire for lots of reasons on a lot of fronts. He wasn't good the first time there and they brought him back anyway. The offense was a disaster after they lost the young guy (assistant Joe Brady to the NFL). …

• "All that being said, Ed Orgeron continues to recruit. That is his wheelhouse. When Ed won the national championship, that proves players win over coaches.…

• "I watched some of their games last year and I was embarrassed by the way they played, with the lack of effort and toughness. And the coaching staff never made any adjustments. You could see the frustration on Ed's face. I'm surprised he didn't fight some of those guys."

## TIGERS SPRING ROSTER

| Quarterback | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15 Myles Brennan | QB | 6-4 | 210 | Sr. | Long Beach, MS |
| 14 Max Johnson | QB | 6-5 | 219 | So. | Athens, GA |
| 5 Garrett Nussmeier | QB | 6-2 | 172 | Fr. | Lake Charles |
| **Running Back** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 8 Tre Bradford | RB | 6-0 | 190 | So. | Dallas, TX |
| 3 Tyrion Davis-Price | RB | 6-1 | 232 | Jr. | Baton Rouge |
| 35 Nick Demas | RB | 5-11 | 202 | Fr. | Westfield, IN |
| 4 John Emery Jr. | RB | 5-11 | 215 | Jr. | St. Rose |
| Armoni Goodwin | RB | 5-8 | 190 | Fr. | Trussville, AL |
| Corey Kiner | RB | 5-10 | 205 | Fr. | Cincinnati, OH |
| 23 Corren Norman | RB | 5-9 | 191 | So. | Lafayette |
| 27 Josh Williams | RB | 5-9 | 195 | So. | Houston, TX |
| **Wide Receivers** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 12 Alex Adams | WR | 6-0 | 196 | So. | Osyka, MS |
| Jack Bech | WR/TE | 6-2 | 215 | Fr. | Lafayette |
| 1 Kayshon Boutte | WR | 6-0 | 185 | So. | New Iberia |
| 88 Evan Francioni | WR | 5-11 | 194 | Jr. | River Ridge |
| 82 LJ Gilyot | WR | 5-10 | 166 | So. | New Orleans |
| Chris Hilton Jr. | WR | 6-0 | 176 | Fr. | Zachary |
| 10 Jaray Jenkins | WR | 6-4 | 194 | Jr. | Jena |
| 13 Jontre Kirklin | WR | 6-0 | 184 | Sr. | Lutcher |
| 29 Ethan Laing | WR | 5-11 | 176 | Fr. | Lafayette |
| 16 Devonta Lee | WR | 6-2 | 224 | Jr. | Fluker |
| 2 Koy Moore | WR | 6-0 | 174 | So. | Kenner |
| Malik Nabers | WR | 6-0 | 190 | Fr. | Youngsville |
| 33 Trey Palmer | WR | 6-0 | 180 | Jr. | Kentwood |
| 6 Deion Smith | WR | 6-3 | 203 | Fr. | Jackson, MS |
| Brian Thomas Jr. | WR | 6-4 | 195 | Fr. | Walker |
| **Tight Ends** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 46 Charlie Drost | TE | 6-4 | 236 | Fr. | Lake Charles |
| 45 Stephen King | TE | 6-6 | 257 | Jr. | Alexandria, VA |
| 30 Jack Mashburn | TE | 6-2 | 218 | So. | Mandeville |
| 42 Aaron Moffitt | TE | 6-2 | 237 | Sr. | Baton Rouge |
| Jalen Shead | TE | 6-4 | 240 | Fr. | Olive Branch, MS |
| 85 Nick Storz | TE | 6-5 | 260 | Jr. | Brooklyn, NY |
| 87 Kole Taylor | TE | 6-7 | 243 | So. | Grand Junction, CO |
| **Offensive Lineman** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 75 Anthony Bradford | OL | 6-5 | 365 | So. | Muskegon, MI |
| 76 Austin Deculus | OL | 6-6 | 331 | Sr. | Mamou |
| 72 Garrett Dellinger | OL | 6-4 | 307 | Fr. | Clarkston, MI |
| 74 Marcus Dumervil | OL | 6-5 | 310 | Fr. | Lauderdale Lakes, FL |
| 71 Xavier Hill | OL | 6-3 | 307 | Fr. | Olive Branch, MS |
| 57 Chasen Hines | OG | 6-3 | 349 | Sr. | Marshall, TX |
| 70 Ed Ingram | OG | 6-3 | 315 | Sr. | DeSoto, TX |
| Kimo Makaneole | OL | 6-4 | 285 | Fr. | Niceville, FL |
| 77 Marlon Martinez | OL | 6-4 | 325 | So. | Fort Lauderdale, FL |
| 67 Spencer Payne | OL | 6-2 | 292 | Fr. | Castroville, TX |
| 78 Thomas Perry | OL | 6-6 | 329 | So. | Lafayette |
| 51 Dare Rosenthal | OT | 6-7 | 327 | Jr. | Ferriday |
| 56 Liam Shanahan | OL | 6-5 | 304 | Sr. | Marlborough, MA |
| 58 Kardell Thomas | OL | 6-3 | 326 | So. | Baton Rouge |
| 69 Charles Turner | OL | 6-5 | 287 | So. | Canton, OH |
| 61 Cameron Wire | OT | 6-6 | 311 | Jr. | Gonzales |
| **Defensive Lineman** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 55 Jarell Cherry | DE | 6-2 | 277 | Jr. | Dallas, TX |
| 94 Joseph Evans | DL | 6-1 | 310 | So. | Haynesville |
| 92 Neil Farrell Jr. | DE | 6-4 | 319 | Sr. | Mobile, AL |
| 11 Ali Gaye | DL | 6-6 | 262 | Sr. | Lynnwood, WA |
| 90 Jacobian Guillory | DL | 6-2 | 344 | Fr. | Alexandria |
| 40 Landon Jackson | DL | 6-6 | 259 | Fr. | Texarkana, TX |
| Savion Jones | DL | 6-5 | 240 | Fr. | Vacherie |
| Bryce Langston | DL | 6-3 | 270 | Fr. | Ocala, FL |
| 97 Glen Logan | DE | 6-3 | 339 | Sr. | Kenner |
| 99 Jaquelin Roy | DL | 6-4 | 302 | So. | Baton Rouge |
| 0 Maason Smith | DL | 6-6 | 312 | Fr. | Houma |
| 96 Eric Taylor | DL | 6-4 | 313 | Fr. | Trussville, AL |
| **Linebackers** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 3 Andre Anthony | OLB | 6-3 | 255 | Sr. | New Orleans |
| 23 Micah Baskerville | LB | 6-1 | 231 | Sr. | Shreveport |
| 54 Aaron Benfield | LB | 6-0 | 225 | So. | Lafitte |
| 17 Zavier Carter | LB | 6-5 | 190 | Fr. | Atlanta, GA |
| 18 Damone Clark | LB | 6-3 | 245 | Sr. | Baton Rouge |
| 37 Hunter Faust | LB | 6-0 | 216 | Jr. | New Orleans |
| 53 Soni Fonua | OLB | 6-3 | 268 | Sr. | Salt Lake City, UT |
| Mike Jones Jr. | LB | 6-0 | 220 | So. | Nashville, TN |
| 59 Desmond Little | OLB | 6-5 | 218 | So. | Prichard, AL |
| 8 BJ Ojulari | LB | 6-2 | 230 | So. | Marietta, GA |
| Greg Penn III | LB | 6-1 | 225 | Fr. | Baltimore, MD |
| 34 Antoine Sampah | LB | 6-1 | 205 | So. | Woodbridge, VA |
| 58 Jared Small | LB | 6-0 | 209 | Sr. | Baton Rouge |
| 22 Navonteque Strong | LB | 6-2 | 220 | So. | Forest, MS |
| 44 Dylan Thompson | OLB | 6-1 | 265 | So. | New Orleans |
| 39 Phillip Webb | LB | 6-4 | 226 | Fr. | Buford, GA |
| 10 Josh White | LB | 6-0 | 215 | So. | Houston, TX |
| 48 Sloan Wright | LB | 6-1 | 236 | Fr. | Lafayette |
| **Defensive Backs** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 28 Lloyd Cole | CB | 6-0 | 205 | Sr. | Bossier City |
| 6 Derrick Davis Jr. | DB | 6-1 | 191 | Fr. | Wilkinsburg, PA |
| 26 Darren Evans | DB | 6-3 | 180 | Sr. | Baton Rouge |
| 25 Cordale Flott | CB | 6-1 | 165 | Jr. | Saraland, AL |
| 27 Zaven Fountain | S | 6-3 | 186 | Jr. | New Orleans |
| 4 Todd Harris Jr. | S | 6-1 | 195 | Sr. | Maringouin |
| 29 Raydarious Jones | CB | 6-2 | 170 | So. | Horn Lake, MS |
| Matthew Langlois | DB | 6-0 | 185 | Fr. | New Roads |
| 31 Cameron Lewis | S | 6-1 | 195 | Sr. | Monroe |
| Damarius McGhee | DB | 6-1 | 175 | Fr. | Pensacola, FL |
| 2 Dwight McGlothern | CB | 6-2 | 182 | So. | Houston, TX |
| 1 Eli Ricks | CB | 6-2 | 196 | So. | Rancho Cucamonga, CA |
| Sage Ryan | DB | 5-11 | 195 | Fr. | Lafayette |
| 24 Derek Stingley Jr. | CB | 6-1 | 195 | Jr. | Baton Rouge |
| 21 Jordan Toles | S | 6-0 | 199 | So. | Baltimore, MD |
| 5 Jay Ward | CB | 6-1 | 176 | Jr. | Moultrie, GA |
| **Specialist** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 32 Avery Atkins | PK | 5-11 | 214 | Sr. | Auburn, AL |
| 41 Emory Duggar | SNP | 6-3 | 235 | Fr. | Baton Rouge |
| 49 Jonathan Ferguson | SNP | 6-1 | 222 | Fr. | Sacramento, CA |
| 39 Ezekeal Mata | PK | 5-11 | 180 | Fr. | San Marcos, CA |
| 47 Max Peterson | SNP | 5-11 | 213 | Fr. | Weston, MA |
| 48 Quentin Skinner | SNP | 6-0 | 243 | So. | Buford, GA |
| 43 Preston Stafford | PK | 5-10 | 174 | Jr. | Baton Rouge |
| 38 Peyton Todd | P | 6-6 | 218 | Fr. | West Monroe |
| 36 Cade York | PK | 6-1 | 198 | Jr. | McKinney, TX |

## INDIVIDUAL STATS

### PASSING

| NAME | GP | Effic | Cmp | Att | Int | Pct | Yards | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| M. Brennan | 3 | 154.7 | 79 | 131 | 3 | 60.3 | 1112 | 11 | 75 | 370.7 |
| M. Johnson | 6 | 134.8 | 88 | 150 | 1 | 58.7 | 1069 | 8 | 47 | 178.2 |

### RECEIVING

| RECEIVING | GP | No. | Yards | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K. Boutte | 10 | 45 | 735 | 16.3 | 5 | 47 | 73.5 |
| T. Marshall Jr. | 7 | 48 | 731 | 15.2 | 10 | 75 | 104.4 |
| J. Jenkins | 10 | 23 | 397 | 17.3 | 2 | 47 | 39.7 |

### RUSHING

| RUSHING | GP | Att. | Gain | Loss | Net | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| T. Davis-Price | 9 | 104 | 458 | 12 | 446 | 4.3 | 3 | 35 | 49.5 |
| J. Emery Jr. | 9 | 75 | 396 | 18 | 378 | 5.0 | 3 | 54 | 42.0 |
| C. Curry | 9 | 45 | 153 | 8 | 145 | 3.2 | 0 | 13 | 16.1 |

### DEF. LEADERS

Tackles: D. Clark 63, J. Stevens 63, J. Cox 58
Tackles for loss: A. Gaye 9.5, J. Cox 6.5, J. Stevens 6.0
Sacks: A. Anthony 5.5, BJ Ojulari 4, J. Stevens 3
Interceptions: E. Ricks 4, J. Cox 3, J. Ward 3

# 247SPORTS TIGERS RECRUITING 2021

## 3 NEWCOMERS OF IMPACT

### Maason Smith

The five-star and No. 2 defensive tackle in the 247Sports Composite rankings has been on LSU's campus since January, and he made waves as an early-enrollee in spring practices. The Tigers have all four starters on the defensive line returning in 2021, but LSU coach Ed Orgeron has already circled Smith as a candidate to potentially knock a veteran out of the starting lineup.

### Navonteque Strong

The No. 1 junior college linebacker in the 247Sports Composite rankings pulled a late flip from Mississippi State to LSU. He's expected to be a key piece as the Tigers attempt to rebound from 2020, one of the worst defensive showings in program history. Strong is a big hitter who will play plenty this fall.

### Sage Ryan

Ryan joined Maason Smith as the two five-star prospects the Tigers signed, and he left high school ranked as the No. 2 safety in the 247Sports Composite rankings. LSU doesn't have much depth at safety, and Ryan is carrying big expectations that he can play — and potentially start — right away as a true freshman.

## SLEEPER

### Matthew Langlois

Langlois was rated as a three-star prospect, according to the 247Sports Composite, but when the dust settles a few years down the road he will likely be viewed as underrated. Langlois is a multi-sport athlete who can play sideline-to-sideline at the safety spot. LSU fans, file his name away.

## 2022 NEEDS

LSU's biggest needs come at positions like safety and tight end, where the Tigers are set to begin the 2021 season well below the norm when it comes to total scholarship players on the roster. Georgia's Jake Johnson, the younger brother of LSU quarterback Max Johnson, is one of the nation's most coveted tight end prospects. LSU, the program often labeled as "DBU" in recent years, hasn't had many issues restocking the secondary.

— By Shea Dixon, Geaux247.com

## 247SPORTS COMPOSITE

| 2 | 14 | 5 | 0 |
|---|---|---|---|
| ✪✪✪✪✪ | ✪✪✪✪ | ✪✪✪ | ✪✪ |

| | |
|---|---|
| Committments | 21 |
| Average Stars | 3.86 |
| Total Stars | 81 |
| National Rank: 3 | SEC: 2 |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Jack Bech** | WR/TE | 6-2 | 215 | ✪✪✪ | Lafayette | St. Thomas More |

247Sports.com rated No. 13 player in Louisiana… As a junior, helped team to 11-2 record and state championship… Had 91 receptions for 1,668 yards and 20 touchdowns.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Zavier Carter** | DE | 6-5 | 190 | ✪✪✪✪ | Atlanta, GA | Hapeville Charter Acad. |

Ranked No. 15 defensive end nationally and No. 19 player in Georgia by 247Sports.com… Had 74 tackles (57 solo) and seven quarterback sacks as a senior.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Derrick Davis, Jr.** | DB | 6-1 | 191 | ✪✪✪✪ | Monroeville, PA | Gateway |

247Sports.com rated No. 51 player and No. 1 safety nationally… As a junior, had 36 receptions for 547 yards and 1,507 yards rushing and scored 28 touchdowns… Had 46 tackles, two interceptions and one fumble caused… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Garrett Dellinger** | OL | 6-4 | 307 | ✪✪✪✪ | Clarkston, MI | Clarkston |

Invited to Under Armour All-American Game.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Armoni Goodwin** | RB | 5-8 | 190 | ✪✪✪✪ | Trussville, AL | Hewitt-Trussville |

Ranked No. 78 player nationally and No. 4 player in Alabama by 247Sports.com… Had 485 yards rushing and 10 touchdowns as a junior before season was cut short by injury… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Chris Hilton, Jr.** | WR | 6-0 | 176 | ✪✪✪✪ | Zachary | Zachary |

247Sports.com rated No. 54 player nationally and No. 4 player in Louisiana… As a junior, had 43 receptions for 846 yards and 11 touchdowns… Helped team to state championship as a sophomore.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Landon Jackson** | DL | 6-6 | 259 | ✪✪✪✪ | Texarkana, TX | Pleasant Grove |

Had 45 career quarterback sacks… Had 17 quarterback sacks as a junior… Helped team to state championships in 2017 and 2019.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Saivion Jones** | DL | 6-5 | 240 | ✪✪✪✪ | Vacherie | St. James |

Ranked No. 5 player in Louisiana by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had 75 tackles and 10 quarterback sacks… Had 103 tackles, including 13 tackles for loss, 13 quarterback sacks and 25 quarterback hurries as a junior, while helping team to a 15-0 record and a state championship.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Corey Kiner** | RB | 5-10 | 205 | ✪✪✪✪ | Cincinnati, OH | Roger Bacon |

247Sports.com rated No. 7 running back nationally and No. 7 player in Ohio…Had 7,130 career rushing yards and 116 touchdowns… Had 125 total career touchdowns… Had 1,866 yards rushing and 35 touchdowns as a senior.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Matthew Langlois** | DB | 6-0 | 185 | ✪✪✪ | New Roads | Catholic H.S. of Pointe Coupee |

Ranked No. 30 safety nationally and No. 15 player in Louisiana by 247Sports.com… As a junior, had 1,343 yards rushing and 27 touchdowns… Had 68 tackles, four quarterback sacks and 12 passes broken up… Helped team to state championship game.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Bryce Langston** | DL | 6-3 | 270 | ✪✪✪✪ | Ocala, FL | Vanguard |

247Sports.com rated No. 12 strongside defensive end nationally… Had 51 tackles, including 10 tackles for loss, and two quarterback sacks as a junior… As a sophomore, had 43 tackles, including 14 tackles for loss, and 3.5 sacks… Helped team to undefeated regular season.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Damarius McGhee** | DB | 6-1 | 175 | ✪✪✪✪ | Pensacola, FL | Pensacola Catholic |

Ranked No. 14 defensive back nationally and No. 28 player in Florida by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had three interceptions and scored six touchdowns… Helped team to 11-1 record as a junior… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game and U.S. Army All-American Game.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Malik Nabers** | ATH | 6-0 | 190 | ✪✪✪✪ | Youngsville | Southside |

247Sports.com rated No. 18 wide receiver nationally and No. 6 player in Louisiana… Had 58 receptions for 1,223 yards and 21 touchdowns as a junior.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Garrett Nussmeier** | QB | 6-2 | 172 | ✪✪✪✪ | Flower Mound, TX | Marcus |

Ranked No. 83 player and No. 9 pro-style quarterback nationally and No. 14 player in Texas by 247Sports.com… As a senior, completed 213 of 293 passes for 2,815 yards and 33 touchdowns with five interceptions… Completed 623 of 946 career passes for 8,160 yards and 83 touchdowns.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Greg Penn, III** | LB | 6-1 | 225 | ✪✪✪✪ | Baltimore, MD | DeMatha Catholic |

247Sports.com rated No. 11 inside linebacker nationally and No. 10 player in Maryland.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Sage Ryan** | DB | 5-11 | 195 | ✪✪✪✪✪ | Lafayette | Lafayette Christian Acad. |

Ranked No. 2 safety nationally and No. 2 player in Louisiana by 247Sports.com… Had 576 yards rushing and 13 touchdowns as a senior… Had 18 receptions for 297 yards and three touchdowns… Returned three punts for touchdowns… As a junior, had 31 tackles and two interceptions as a junior… Had 37 receptions for 702 yards and eight touchdowns… Helped team to four consecutive state championships.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Jalen Shead** | TE | 6-4 | 240 | ✪✪✪ | Olive Branch, MS | Olive Branch |

247Sports.com rated No. 13 player in Mississippi… Didn't compete in varsity football until his junior season.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Deion Smith** | WR | 6-3 | 203 | ✪✪✪✪ | Jackson, MS | Jackson Academy |

Ranked No. 65 player and No. 10 wide receiver nationally and No. 1 player in Mississippi by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had 36 receptions for 640 yards and seven touchdowns… Had 189 yards rushing and two touchdowns… Had 43 receptions for 1,059 yards and 19 touchdowns as a junior.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Maason Smith** | DL | 6-6 | 312 | ✪✪✪✪✪ | Houma | Terrebonne |

247Sports.com rated No. 18 player and No. 2 defensive lineman nationally… Had more than 200 career tackles, including 60 tackles for loss, and 26 quarterback sacks… Had 63 tackles, including 24 tackles for loss, nine quarterback sacks and 22 quarterback hurries as a senior.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Navonteque Strong** | LB | 6-2 | 220 | ✪✪✪ | Forest, MS | Mississippi Gulf Coast CC |

Ranked No. 1 junior college middle linebacker nationally by 247Sports.com… As a sophomore, had 59 tackles, including 11.5 tackles for loss, five quarterback sacks and two fumbles caused… Helped team to NJCAA national championship with 104 tackles, including 17.5 tackles for loss, and 8.5 quarterback sacks as a freshman.

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Peyton Todd** | P | 6-6 | 218 | ✪✪✪ | West Monroe | West Monroe |

247Sports.com rated No. 1 punter nationally… Averaged 42 yards per punt, with 20 punts downed inside the 20-yard line as a junior… Led team in interceptions at linebacker.

# PLAYER PROFILE

## Boutte Out to Show He's Just Getting Started

Sophomore wide receiver Kayshon Boutte can't escape mention of last season's Ole Miss game.

Go home to New Iberia, La., and people want to hear all about how he dismantled the Rebels. Address sportscasters and sportswriters in the offseason, and he's asked to recount the exploits many of them watched in person.

Memorable though it was, Boutte knows his record-setting performance won't count for much if he can't sustain the late-season momentum he generated. To that end, he's prepared to give everyone something else to talk about.

"There is more to show in 2021, for sure," he said of both himself and the rest of the receiving corps. "Just look forward to it. That's all I'm going to say."

Boutte may be a young man of measured words as he lets his performances speak for themselves. And what he accomplished at Ole Miss certainly spoke volumes about his bright future, as well as directing a ray of hope in LSU's future.

On a rain-soaked night in a wild shootout, Boutte caught 14 passes for an SEC-record 308 yards and three touchdowns in the Tigers' 53-48 season-ending victory. With his good hands and sharp routes, he showed an ability to run after the catch.

Boutte's transformation from a capable receiver to a premier wideout actually began two games earlier against eventual national champion Alabama.

Lost in LSU's 55-17 setback was Boutte's eight catches for 111 yards. He followed that with five receptions for 108 yards and one touchdown in a 37-34 upset of sixth-ranked Florida. In saving his best for last, Boutte finished the season with 45 receptions for 735 yards and five touchdowns.

Boutte said that in arriving at LSU, he "didn't really know what to expect" given that he was surrounded by more heralded players. But opportunity soon presented itself, and Boutte made the most of it.

WR
KAYSHON BOUTTE
Photo by AP Photo/Matthew Hinton

Ja'Marr Chase, the 2019 Biletnikoff Award winner, opted out of the season. Terrace Marshall opted out after seven games. Tight end Arik Gilbert left as well. In stepped Boutte, who proved himself more than worthy.

Coach Ed Orgeron went so far as to say Boutte is "going to be one of the great players we have here at LSU."

To that end, Boutte spent the offseason catching countless passes and engaging with his teammates in exercises to improve his focus.

Of course, he did all that when not talking about a past that may well be prologue.

For more coverage visit lindyssports.com/college-football/sec/lsu

# BEST AND BRIGHTEST

## MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

### CB DEREK STINGLEY JR.

Even limited to seven games due to injury, he earned Football Coaches Association All-America honors for the second year in a row, becoming only the 12th player in school history to win All-America first-team honors twice in his career. … He finished with 27 tackles, including 2.5 tackles for loss, five passes defended and a fumble recovery. … In two years, Stingley has 65 tackles and six interceptions. … Was a consensus All-American in 2019.

## EMERGING STAR

### WR KAYSHON BOUTTE

Before the season finale at Ole Miss, Boutte was having a more-than-respectable freshman season with 31 catches for 427 yards and two touchdowns. … With his stunning performance, Boutte served notice that he has all the makings of a premier receiver, as he riddled the Rebels with 14 receptions for an SEC single-game record 308 yards and three touchdowns. … He averaged 16.3 yards per catch for the season. … Was rated the No. 1 WR in Louisiana as a high school senior.

## TOP NEWCOMER

### LB NAVONTEQUE STRONG

After helping Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College to the NJCAA national championship as a freshman, he registered 59 tackles, including 11.5 for loss in six games last season. … He also forced two fumbles, and twice was named the MACCC Defensive Player of the Week. … In two seasons, Strong had 29 tackles for loss and 13.5 sacks in becoming one of the top JUCO players in the country — including as the No. 1 middle linebacker by 247Sports.

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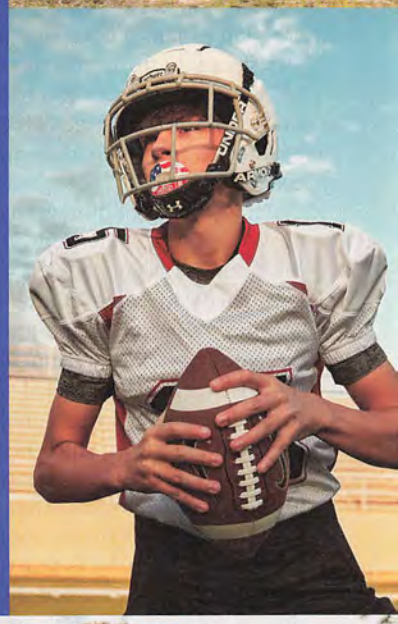


# OLE MISS REBELS

For more coverage of the Rebels, visit olemiss.247Sports.com

**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Jeff Lebby **DEFENSIVE COORDINATORS:** DJ Durkin, Chris Partridge **STADIUM:** Vaught-Hemingway Stadium: 64,038

## KIFFIN RETURNS PLENTY OF FIREPOWER TO OXFORD IN YEAR 2

When Ole Miss athletics director Keith Carter convinced Lane Kiffin to lead the Rebels' restoration project, it looked like a home run hire.

Kiffin followed up with solid contact in his first at-bat, the bizarre COVID-19 season of 2020, and has set the table for a bigger 2021.

His debut ended up being a 4-5 regular season against an all-SEC schedule. Four conference victories were something Ole Miss had not achieved since going 6-2 in the Sugar Bowl-winning season of 2015. Kiffin's debut season was punctuated with a 26-20 win over No. 11 Indiana in the Outback Bowl.

A normal season would have included four non-conference games and possibly an eight-win season for the Rebels.

So, yes, it was a solid beginning to Carter's plan to pump life into a program that was struggling to regain footing after the NCAA sanctions that occurred during the time of coach Hugh Freeze, followed by the apathetic reaction to the short tenure of coach Matt Luke.

Carter thought Kiffin was a clear choice.

"What I was really impressed with was his vision for what Ole Miss football could be aligned with mine," Carter said.

Kiffin's vision of play-calling with equal parts of aggression, imagination and mad scientist helped transform Matt Corral from a quarterback who couldn't keep the job in an offense in which he was a bad fit to a guy who goes into this season receiving Heisman Trophy mention.

Kiffin hired offensive coordinator Jeff Lebby away from UCF, and together they crafted a unit that finished third in the nation in total offense, fifth in passing efficiency and seventh in passing yards.

All this from an offense that did not take a pass-first approach. What goes overlooked is the fact that the Rebels ran the ball 60 percent of the time and led the SEC in rushing with 210.6 yards a game.

Along the way, slot receiver Elijah Moore became a star, surpassing Heisman Trophy winner DeVonta Smith in leading the nation in receptions per game and receiving yards per game.

Moore was drafted by the Jets early in the second round with the 34th pick.

Moore is gone, but Corral and many other playmakers on offense return. The Rebels won't sneak up on anybody.

As expectations surround the program, it's a topic Kiffin has yet to address inside the building.

"We probably will address that eventually," he said. "It's good to have some energy around, and with that comes expectations as a team and with individuals. The quarterback is coming back, and I'm sure there will be a lot of preseason attention on that."

## OFFENSE

Matt Corral's return is enough to legitimize the high expectations of 2021.

In a 2020 offense that better suited Corral, he beat out John Rhys Plumlee — who led the SEC in rushing yards per game as a freshman in 2019 — and went on to lead the nation in total offense at 384.9 yards a game.

Corral, now a fourth-year junior, showed arm strength with nice touch on deep balls, plus elusiveness in the pocket and the skills to be a threat in the run game.

He developed an early chemistry with Elijah Moore, whose 86 catches were 59 more than the next Ole Miss target. That production most likely will be spread around in 2021.

Braylon Sanders, who took advantage of the NCAA's offer of an extra season of eligibility, is an intriguing deep threat. He's averaged 20.1 yards per catch in his career — 25.1 last season — but he's also struggled with injuries, including a bad ankle sprain at LSU last year that caused him to miss the bowl game and most of spring drills.

Dontario Drummond is back after proving to be a dependable option on the outside last year, so much so that Jonathan Mingo was moved inside when Moore announced he was opting out for the last two games.

The staff is eager to see Mingo produce at the high level expected when he turned down Georgia to sign with Ole Miss as a four-star recruit in 2019. His physicality

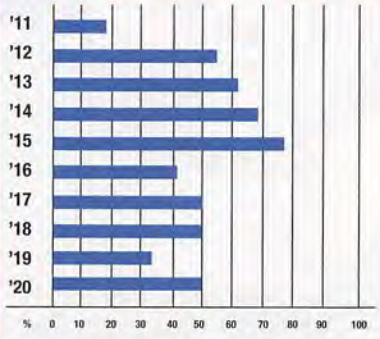
## SCHEDULE

| Date | Opponent | '20 Record |
|---|---|---|
| Sept. 6 | vs. Louisville (Atlanta, GA) | 4-7 |
| Sept. 11 | AUSTIN PEAY | 4-5 |
| Sept. 18 | TULANE | 6-6 |
| Oct. 2 | at Alabama | 13-0 |
| Oct. 9 | ARKANSAS | 3-7 |
| Oct. 16 | at Tennessee | 3-7 |
| Oct. 23 | LSU | 5-5 |
| Oct. 30 | at Auburn | 6-5 |
| Nov. 6 | LIBERTY | 10-1 |
| Nov. 13 | TEXAS A&M | 9-1 |
| Nov. 20 | VANDERBILT | 0-9 |
| Nov. 25 | at Mississippi State | 4-7 |

## RESULTS

| 5-5, 4-5 | | |
|---|---|---|
| L | FLORIDA | 35-51 |
| W | at Kentucky (OT) | 42-41 |
| L | ALABAMA | 48-63 |
| L | at Arkansas | 21-33 |
| L | AUBURN | 28-35 |
| W | at Vanderbilt | 54-21 |
| W | SOUTH CAROLINA | 59-42 |
| W | MISSISSIPPI STATE | 31-24 |
| | at Texas A&M | CAN |
| L | at LSU | 48-53 |
| | **OUTBACK BOWL** | |
| W | vs. Indiana | 26-20 |

## 10-YEAR WINNING TREND



## AT A GLANCE

### LOCATION:
Oxford, Miss.

### 2020:
5-5 overall, 4-5 SEC (5th, West)

### COACH:
Lane Kiffin — At Ole Miss: 5-5, 1 year; overall: 67-39, 9 years

### RETURNING STARTERS:
17, 8 offense, 8 defense, punter

### PLAYERS TO WATCH:
QB Matt Corral, RB Jerrion Ealy, WR Braylon Sanders, WR Dontario Drummond, LT Nick Broeker, DE Sam Williams, LB Jacquez Jones, S Otis Reese

### PRIMARY STRENGTHS:
Corral has good arm strength, elusiveness and in most cases plays within himself and the offense. Sanders is a deep threat who has made plays when healthy. Running backs are deep, and former starting quarterback John Rhys Plumlee could make an impact at slot receiver and in other packages if he chooses to change positions. The question was unresolved at the end of spring.

### POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:
The defense was terrible last year. Ole Miss is pinning hopes on a number of players who weren't around last year. There is experience at receiver, but not chemistry. Corral will have to find that quickly. Depth behind Corral and along the offensive line is unproven.

### KEY LOSSES:
WR Elijah Moore, OL Royce Newman, TE Kenny Yeboah

### OVERVIEW:
Some level of defensive improvement is expected, and with the offensive firepower returning, the Rebels don't need to be a top 10 defense. A top 50 defense could yield big rewards. Sanders would have made more plays last year if so many balls had not been targeted for Moore. His health is key, and it's been a question mark throughout his career.

The Rebels can improve on last year's 4-5 regular season if Corral quickly finds a comfort level with a couple of targets.,

### KEY NUMBER:
**7** Number of 300-yard passing games last season for Matt Corral, including four over 385 (with a high of 513, against South Carolina).

LB
Jacquez
JONES

Photo by AP Photo/Thomas Graning

QB

**Matt Corral**

Photo by Michael Wade

## SCOUTING REPORT: Offense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | **Matt Corral*** | Jr. | Big arm, fighter, makes things click in an explosive offense. | Kinkead Dent, So. |
| RB | **Jerrion Ealy*** | Jr. | Runs hard; uses vision; ready after off-season shoulder surgery. | Henry Parrish Jr., So. |
| WR | **Dontario Drummond*** | Sr. | Seven TD catches as first-year JC transfer in 2021. | Jadon Jackson, So. |
| WR | Braylon Sanders | Sr. | Gets open downfield and makes plays but must stay healthy. | Bralon Brown, Fr. |
| SL | **Jonathan Mingo*** | Jr. | Physical after the catch; turns short passes into big gains. | John Rhys Plumlee, Jr. |
| TE | Hudson Wolfe | Fr. | Athletic newcomer but must overcome high school back injury. | Casey Kelly, So. |
| LT | **Nick Broeker*** | Jr. | Could have an NFL decision to make after this season. | Hamilton Hall, Jr. |
| LG | **Caleb Warren*** | So. | Looking to build on solid freshman season. | Jalen Cunningham, Jr. |
| C | **Ben Brown*** | Sr. | Entering second season at center after two years at guard. | Bryce Ramsey, So. |
| RG | Cedric Melton | Fr. | Impressed coaches enough in the spring to crack starting lineup. | Reece McIntyre, So. |
| RT | **Jeremy James*** | So. | Earned freshman All-American honors at RG last season. | Eli Acker, Fr. |
| PK | Caden Costa | Fr. | Rated as the No. 7 kicker nationally in the 247Sports Composite. | Cale Nation, So. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

## SCOUTING REPORT: Defense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | Tariqious Tisdale | Sr. | Back for second senior season after 2020 cut short by injury. | Tavius Robinson, Sr. |
| DT | Isaiah Iton | Jr. | JC transfer will be expected to hold ground and push pocket. | Tywone Malone, Fr. |
| DT | Quentin Bivens | Jr. | Competitive spot, with JC transfer Jamond Gordon a factor. | **K.D. Hill, Jr.*** |
| **DE** | **Sam Williams*** | Sr. | Quick off the edge and disruptive in the backfield. | Cedric Johnson, So. |
| **LB** | **Jacquez Jones*** | Sr. | Active playmaker led the team with 75 tackles last year. | **Mohamed Sanogo, Sr.*** |
| **LB** | **Lakia Henry*** | Sr. | Hopes to boost draft stock; played better late in 2020. | Chance Campbell, Sr. |
| Star | Otis Reese | Sr. | Georgia transfer gives Rebels a potential All-SEC player at DB. | Jalen Jordan, Jr. |
| CB | Miles Battle | Jr. | Former wide receiver embraced move and impressed in spring. | Deantre Prince, Jr. |
| CB | Deane Leonard | Sr. | Tempting? Was selected 18th overall in 2021 CFL Draft. | **Keidron Smith, Sr.*** |
| SS | Jake Springer | Sr. | Navy transfer had eight sacks, 16 TFLs for Middies in 2019. | **Jon Haynes, Sr.*** |
| **FS** | **A.J. Finley*** | Jr. | Best playmaker in last year's secondary had 3 INTs, 7 PBUs. | Tylan Knight, Sr. |
| **P** | **Mac Brown*** | Sr. | Combines distance (46.6 yards) with height on punts. | Caden Costa, Fr. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

after the catch could allow him to have a breakout year in the slot.

Plumlee could see ample time in the slot. He had little impact last year after thriving in a run-based offense under former coordinator Rich Rodriguez. Plumlee played slot receiver in the bowl game and had five catches for 79 yards.

Kiffin said a decision would be made after baseball season — Plumlee is a reserve outfielder for the Rebels — as to whether Plumlee would compete with third-year sophomore Kinkead Dent to be Corral's backup or move to receiver full time.

The offensive line returns almost intact but not without some shuffling.

The Rebels must replace right tackle Royce Newman, a fourth-round draft pick, and it appears that will be done with Jeremy James, a high school tackle and freshman All-American at right guard last season.

The newcomer to the lineup could be sophomore Cedric Melton at right guard.

Left tackle Nick Broeker, a junior, could have an NFL decision to make after this season. Senior center Ben Brown and sophomore left guard Caleb Warren round out the line.

Running back Jerrion Ealy (745 yards, 5.1 per carry) was second-team All-SEC as a utility player and is expected to be at full strength after offseason shoulder surgery.

Jarod "Snoop" Conner, the banger in the backfield, and sophomore Henry Parrish make running back a deep position.

## DEFENSE

While the Ole Miss offense was electric last season, the defense struggled. The Rebels finished No. 100 or lower in every major defensive statistical category, including No. 126 out of 127 in total defense giving up 519.0 yards a game.

The only staff casualty was defensive line where Deke Adams was let go. Kiffin hired Randall Joyner from SMU.

There's plenty of new blood among the players to spark improvement.

The signing class included 14 defensive players, plus other impact transfers. Junior college transfers Isaiah Iton and Jamond Gordon will help at the tackles, and Gordon can play on the edge as well.

In the spring signing period, the Rebels added four-star tackle Tywone Malone, nimble at 300-plus pounds, who also plays baseball.

End Sam Williams returns after leading the team with eight tackles for loss and four sacks. Better play up front could free up experienced linebackers to make more plays.

Weakside linebacker Lakia Henry chose to return for an extra season with hopes of becoming a second-day draft candidate. Senior Jacquez Jones is also back. Jones led the team with 75 tackles.

Senior Mohamed "MoMo" Sanogo adds depth, and Maryland transfer Chance

## TOP 5 NFL PROSPECTS

**1. Sam Williams** OLB 6-4 265 4.52 Sr.

Primed for a big 2021 season, Williams already has accumulated 77 tackles, including 17.5 for loss and 10 sacks, through his first two seasons at Ole Miss. He has shown a knack for creating turnovers, forcing two fumbles and nabbing one interception. The quick, physical Williams moves well for his size and flashes an array of moves to shed blockers. In addition, he owns burst off the edge, coupled with relentless pursuit and the ability to ride through blockers to get to the quarterback.

In 2019, following his transfer into Ole Miss from the JC level, had 37 total tackles and six sacks. Williams had sexual battery charges dropped in 2020, allowing him to return to the team following a suspension. He possesses the tools, length and size that will intrigue NFL scouts but must work on being more fluid. If he can stay on the field, look for Williams to earn All-SEC honors and catapult up draft boards.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2. Lakia Henry** | LB | 5-11 | 235 | 4.63 | Sr. |
| **3. Matt Corral** | QB | 6-1 | 205 | 4.79 | Jr. |
| **4. Ben Brown** | C | 6-5 | 315 | 5.30 | Sr. |
| **5. Tariqious Tisdale** | DT | 6-5 | 295 | 5.05 | Sr. |

— Ric Serritella, NFL Draft Bible

Campbell — second in the Big Ten last year in both tackles and tackles for loss — will factor in somewhere.

The secondary looks to be much better with Georgia transfer Otis Reese eligible for the full season and not just three games. When Reese was finally able to play he had 23 tackles, an interception and a pass break-up. Multiply that out for 12 games, and you've got a guy competing for all-conference recognition.

Navy transfer Jacob Springer is expected to start at strong safety. He had 16 tackles for loss and eight sacks for the Midshipmen in 2019.

Junior free safety A.J. Finley headlines the returnees after three interceptions and seven pass break-ups last year.

At corner, there are lots of bodies to consider in a competition that will carry into August camp.

Keidron Smith is a two-year starter, but Deane Leonard and former wide receiver Miles Battle had good springs.

Junior college transfer Deantre Prince is an intriguing piece, more mature than he was as an Ole Miss freshman in 2019 when he picked off two passes and broke up four.

Junior Jalen Jordan and freshman Markevious Brown are also pushing for key roles.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

There will be a new placekicker after the departure of Luke Logan, and the leading candidate, freshman Caden Costa, wasn't on campus for spring drills. Cale Nation and Land Gebhart are also possibilities.

Logan was 6 of 10 on field goal attempts, missing all three attempts beyond 40 yards.

Punter Mac Brown chose to return for a second senior season after averaging 46.6 yards per attempt in 2020. Brown had 10 punts fair caught, eight downed inside the 20.

Jerrion Ealy is a home run threat on kickoff returns, as evidenced by his 100-yard touchdown at LSU. He averaged 28.9 yards per return.

### 2018 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 33.9 | 30 |
| Rushing | 164.1 | 72 |
| Passing | 346.4 | 5 |
| Total | 510.5 | 9 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 36.2 | 113 |
| Rushing | 221.8 | 116 |
| Passing | 261.7 | 111 |
| Total | 483.5 | 121 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 1 | + 0.08 | T-57 |

### 2019 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 26.6 | 82 |
| Rushing | 251.2 | 9 |
| Passing | 194.0 | 102 |
| Total | 445.3 | 26 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 26.5 | 59 |
| Rushing | 138.5 | 42 |
| Passing | 278.3 | 120 |
| Total | 416.8 | 85 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 1 | + 0.08 | T-53 |

### 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 39.2 | 14 |
| Rushing | 210.6 | 26 |
| Passing | 344.9 | 7 |
| Total | 555.5 | 3 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 38.3 | 117 |
| Rushing | 206.9 | 101 |
| Passing | 312.1 | 125 |
| Total | 519.0 | 126 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 5 | - 0.50 | T-97 |

RB **Jerrion Ealy**

Photo by Michael Wade

The Rebels haven't had a dangerous punt returner in years. Dontario Drummond averaged 9.0 yards on three attempts last year.

## SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

The Rebels open with a neutral-site game in Atlanta against a Louisville team that went 3-7 against the ACC last year, their second under coach Scott Satterfield.

With Austin Peay and Tulane to follow, the Rebels have a good chance to be 3-0 with two weeks to prepare for the SEC opener, an Oct. 2 trip to Alabama.

Last year the Rebels pushed Alabama like few teams in the regular season. Ole Miss was driving for a tying touchdown in the middle of the fourth quarter before settling for a field goal and eventually losing 63-48. Lack of defensive stamina was telling. That could be different in 2021.

A Nov. 6 non-conference game — often against an out-manned opponent at that time of year — is anything but a gimme this season as former Ole Miss coach Hugh Freeze and Liberty visit.

— Parrish Alford

# NOTEBOOK

Days after the spring game in late April, **Lane Kiffin** parted ways with offensive line coach **Randy Clements**.

Line play, a question mark a year ago, proved to be solid in 2020. The issue appeared to be over the development of depth behind the first five. The Rebels return four starters.

As of mid-May, the OL coaching position remained vacant.

• Speaking of staff, Kiffin was able to withstand interest in his offensive coordinator **Jeff Lebby**.

There was job market buzz for Lebby — as a head coach — after the Rebels put up big numbers. One of those places was UCF, where Lebby previously put up big numbers and attracted Kiffin's attention.

Keeping Lebby at Ole Miss got a little easier in January when the school bumped his salary to $1.2 million a year.

• Another important staff keep happened a bit more under the radar. **Marquise Watson** moved from graduate assistant helping with the defensive line to an analyst position.

Watson played a key role in the recruitment of coveted defensive tackle **Tywone Malone** when the Rebels were between **Deke Adams** and **Randall Joyner** at the DL coach position.

• Cornerback **Deane Leonard** transferred from his Canadian school to Ole Miss last summer. He played off the bench but is in the mix to start this fall — if he's not playing professionally in his native country.

Leonard (6-2, 195) grew up in Calgary where his dad, **Kenton Leonard**, played for the Calgary Stampeders from 1991-1997.

Deane Leonard was taken in the second round by Hamilton in the CFL Draft on May 4.

He played in eight games last year with 14 tackles, four pass break-ups and an 84-yard fumble return.

He had not announced his plans regarding the CFL, as of mid-May.

• Two-way player **Tylan Knight** (5-7, 180) endeared himself to Ole Miss fans with his toughness in the Outback Bowl and other opportunities. There are lots of bodies to start the 2021 season, and Knight will have to fight again to carve out a role in the secondary.

# REBELS SPRING ROSTER

| Quarterback | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 Luke Altmyer | QB | 6-2 | 195 | Fr. | Starkville |
| 2 Matt Corral | QB | 6-1 | 205 | Jr. | Ventura, CA |
| 12 Kinkead Dent | QB | 6-5 | 205 | So. | Yazoo City |
| 20 Blake Noblin | QB | 6-4 | 205 | Fr. | Ocean Springs |
| 10 John Rhys Plumlee | QB | 6-0 | 200 | Jr. | Hattiesburg |
| **Running Back** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 22 Kentrel Bullock | RB | 5-10 | 215 | So. | Columbia |
| 24 Snoop Conner | RB | 5-10 | 215 | Jr. | Hattiesburg |
| 9 Jerrion Ealy | RB | 5-8 | 190 | Jr. | Walnut Grove |
| 34 Zavier Miller | RB | 5-8 | 160 | Fr. | Kosciusko |
| 25 Henry Parrish Jr. | RB | 5-10 | 190 | So. | Goulds, FL |
| 35 Urriah Shephard | RB | 6-1 | 205 | Sr. | Houston |
| 26 Isaiah Woullard | RB | 5-9 | 205 | Sr. | Hattiesburg |
| **Wide Receivers** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 37 DJ Beckum | WR | 5-8 | 155 | Fr. | Columbus |
| 14 Marc Britt II | WR | 6-0 | 190 | Fr. | Carol City, FL |
| 89 Brandon Buckhaulter | WR | 6-3 | 210 | Fr. | Flowood |
| 84 Qua Davis | WR | 6-1 | 210 | Jr. | Biggersville |
| 11 Dontario Drummond | WR | 6-0 | 215 | Sr. | Laurel |
| 49 Seth Hunter | WR | 6-1 | 160 | Fr. | New Orleans, LA |
| 5 Dannis Jackson | WR | 5-11 | 165 | Jr. | Sumrall |
| 17 Jadon Jackson | WR | 6-2 | 195 | So. | Centerton, AR |
| 16 Jordan Jernigan | WR | 6-0 | 210 | So. | Tupelo |
| 19 Brice Johnson | WR | 6-0 | 190 | So. | Greenville |
| 1 Jonathan Mingo | WR | 6-2 | 215 | Jr. | Brandon |
| 80 Jahcour Pearson | WR | 5-9 | 180 | Sr. | Fort Lauderdale, FL |
| 13 Braylon Sanders | WR | 6-0 | 190 | Sr. | Hogansville, GA |
| 15 Sellers Shy | WR | 6-0 | 190 | So. | Memphis, TN |
| 23 Nevin Wells | WR | 6-1 | 200 | Jr. | Jackson |
| **Tight Ends** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 80 Jonathan Hess | TE | 6-5 | 245 | Jr. | Vestavia Hills, AL |
| 81 Casey Kelly | TE | 6-3 | 240 | So. | Niagara Falls, NY |
| 16 Luke Knox | TE | 6-4 | 245 | Jr. | Brentwood, TN |
| 87 Sam Murphey | TE | 6-3 | 210 | Jr. | Paris, TN |
| 83 Chase Rogers | TE | 6-2 | 250 | Sr. | Pass Christian |
| 44 Payton Rogers | TE | 6-0 | 225 | Sr. | Forest |
| 28 Damarcus Thomas | TE | 6-1 | 245 | So. | Whatley, AL |
| 87 Hudson Wolfe | TE | 6-6 | 235 | Fr. | Savannah, TN |
| **Offensive Lineman** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 73 Eli Acker | OL | 6-5 | 290 | Fr. | Columbus |
| 72 Tobias Braun | OL | 6-7 | 310 | Fr. | Freiburg im Breisgau, GER |
| 64 Nick Broeker | OL | 6-4 | 305 | Jr. | Springfield, IL |
| 55 Ben Brown | OL | 6-5 | 315 | Sr. | Vicksburg |
| 70 Carter Colquitt | OL | 6-3 | 310 | So. | Buford, GA |
| 65 Peyton Cox | OL | 6-0 | 315 | Sr. | Metairie, LA |
| 50 Jalen Cunningham | OL | 6-4 | 340 | Jr. | Odenville, AL |
| 77 Hamilton Hall | OL | 6-4 | 295 | Jr. | Atlanta, GA |
| 78 Jeremy James | OL | 6-5 | 330 | So. | Cumming, GA |
| 56 Reece McIntyre | OL | 6-4 | 315 | So. | Buford, GA |
| 76 Cedric Melton | OL | 6-5 | 310 | Fr. | Houston, TX |
| 57 Micah Pettus | OL | 6-8 | 315 | Fr. | Madison, AL |
| 75 Bryce Ramsey | OL | 6-1 | 340 | So. | Gulfport |
| 52 Luke Shouse | OL | 6-6 | 270 | Fr. | Nolensville, TN |
| 54 Caleb Warren | OL | 6-4 | 305 | So. | Louisville |
| **Defensive Lineman** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 94 Quentin Bivens | DL | 6-2 | 300 | Jr. | Waynesboro |
| 7 LeDarrius Cox | DL | 6-4 | 315 | So. | Mobile, AL |
| 93 Sincere David | DL | 6-2 | 320 | Sr. | Jacksonville, FL |
| 97 Jamond Gordon | DL | 6-4 | 270 | So. | Meridian |
| 55 KD Hill | DL | 6-1 | 320 | Jr. | Eufaula, AL |
| 96 Isaiah Iton | DL | 6-4 | 295 | So. | Houston, TX |
| 45 Amani Johnson | DL | 6-0 | 235 | Sr. | Abbeville |
| 98 Clayton Ladd | DL | 6-1 | 240 | Jr. | Brentwood, TN |
| 50 Patrick Lucas Jr. | DL | 6-3 | 320 | So. | Prattville, AL |
| 91 Hal Northern | DL | 6-2 | 305 | Sr. | Tunica |
| 95 Tavius Robinson | DL | 6-7 | 245 | Sr. | Guelph, Ontario |
| 99 DeSanto Rollins | DL | 6-3 | 275 | Fr. | Baton Rouge, LA |
| 22 Tariqious Tisdale | DL | 6-5 | 295 | Sr. | Lexington, TN |
| 13 Sam Williams | DL | 6-4 | 265 | Sr. | Montgomery, AL |
| **Linebackers** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 30 Zikerrion Baker | LB | 6-1 | 235 | Sr. | Mooringsport, LA |
| 12 Jakivuan Brown | OLB | 6-2 | 240 | So. | Horn Lake |
| 36 Ashanti Cistrunk | LB | 6-1 | 225 | Jr. | Louisville |
| 17 Demon Clowney | OLB | 6-3 | 230 | Fr. | Baltimore, MD |
| 59 John Copley | LB | 6-2 | 225 | Fr. | Camden, SC |
| 53 Carter Craig | LB | 6-1 | 215 | Fr. | Jackson, TN |
| 14 Daylen Gill | LB | 5-11 | 220 | Sr. | Louisville |
| 48 Andrew Griffith | LB | 5-11 | 220 | Jr. | Bentonville, AR |
| 0 Lakia Henry | LB | 5-11 | 235 | Sr. | Vidalia, GA |
| 33 Cedric Johnson | OLB | 6-3 | 240 | So. | Mobile, AL |
| 32 Jacquez Jones | LB | 6-0 | 235 | Sr. | Tuscaloosa, AL |
| 11 Austin Keys | LB | 6-2 | 240 | Fr. | Collins |
| 9 Brandon Mack | OLB | 6-4 | 235 | So. | Montgomery, AL |
| 35 Mark Robinson | LB | 6-0 | 220 | Sr. | Leesburg, GA |
| 46 MoMo Sanogo | LB | 6-1 | 240 | Sr. | Plano, TX |
| **Defensive Backs** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 6 Miles Battle | DB | 6-3 | 195 | Jr. | Houston, TX |
| 15 Derek Bermudez | DB | 6-1 | 185 | Fr. | Jacksonville, FL |
| 37 Kyndrich Breedlove | DB | 6-0 | 175 | Fr. | Nashville, TN |
| 42 Brooks Brock | DB | 6-1 | 175 | Fr. | Meridian |
| 28 Markevious Brown | DB | 6-0 | 170 | Fr. | Pahokee, FL |
| 16 MJ Daniels | DB | 6-3 | 200 | Fr. | Lucedale |
| 40 Jalen Denton | DB | 5-9 | 170 | So. | Memphis, TN |
| 21 A.J. Finley | DB | 6-2 | 200 | Jr. | Mobile, AL |
| 23 Jakorey Hawkins | DB | 5-11 | 195 | Jr. | Montgomery, AL |
| 5 Jon Haynes | DB | 5-11 | 205 | Sr. | Benoit |
| 39 Dink Jackson | DB | 6-1 | 175 | Fr. | Key West, FL |
| 27 Tysheem Johnson | DB | 5-10 | 195 | Fr. | Philadelphia, PA |
| 31 Jaylon Jones | DB | 5-11 | 195 | Sr. | Allen, TX |
| 2 Jalen Jordan | DB | 5-9 | 180 | Jr. | Lake Cormorant |
| 4 Tylan Knight | DB | 5-7 | 180 | Sr. | Pearl |
| 24 Deane Leonard | DB | 6-2 | 195 | Sr. | Calgary, Alberta |
| 43 Daniel Newman | DB | 6-0 | 185 | Fr. | Tallahassee, FL |
| 45 Fred Page | DB | 5-10 | 175 | Fr. | Philadelphia, PA |
| 22 Deantre Prince | DB | 6-1 | 170 | Jr. | Charleston |
| 26 Otis Reese | DB | 6-2 | 215 | Sr. | Leesburg, GA |
| 19 Jamar Richardson | DB | 5-11 | 175 | Sr. | Aliceville, AL |
| 47 Ty Rocconi | DB | 5-11 | 190 | Sr. | Mobile, AL |
| 42 Elijah Sabbatini | DB | 6-1 | 195 | Fr. | Biloxi |
| 20 Keldron Smith | DB | 6-2 | 195 | Sr. | West Palm Beach, FL |
| 39 Jake Springer | DB | 6-0 | 205 | Sr. | Kansas City, MO |
| 25 Tavario Standifer | DB | 6-1 | 215 | So. | Tupelo |
| 41 C.J. Terrell | DB | 5-9 | 215 | Sr. | Oxford |
| 34 Jakwaize Walker | DB | 5-8 | 200 | Sr. | Pascagoula |
| 25 Trey Washington | DB | 5-11 | 190 | Fr. | Trussville, AL |
| 29 Demarko Williams | DB | 5-11 | 185 | Fr. | Atlanta, GA |
| **Specialist** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 58 John Bergeron | LS | 6-0 | 210 | Fr. | Covington, LA |
| 96 Mac Brown | P | 6-3 | 205 | Sr. | Eden Prairie, MN |
| 97 Land Gebhart | K | 5-11 | 155 | Fr. | Ridgeland |
| 41 Solomon Landrum | LS | 6-0 | 230 | Jr. | Hattiesburg |
| 49 Jared Lawrence | LS | 5-10 | 200 | Fr. | Lebanon, TN |
| 93 Cale Nation | K | 5-10 | 160 | So. | Madison |
| 94 Walker Thompson | P | 6-2 | 175 | So. | Laurel |

# OPPOSING COACHES VIEW

• "Ole Miss is so bad on defense. I think (defensive coordinator) D.J. Durkin is average. They were awful on defense last year and never adjusted. The good news is, they can't get any worse. You could put Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs out there and they will be better. …

• "(Offensive coordinator) Jeff Lebby is the reason they had such a great offense last year. He did a remarkable job with the quarterback (Matt Corral). …

• "Their defensive end Sam Williams, that S.O.B is a legit first-round NFL draft choice. The guy is a freak show. He could be one to watch in the SEC. He is a phenomenal talent. He's a powerful guy and he knocks people on their ass. But he will take plays off and go to lunch. If he played every down, he could play on Alabama's defense, and Ole Miss doesn't have a lot of those."

# INDIVIDUAL STATS

## PASSING

| NAME | GP | Effic | Cmp | Att | Int | Pct | Yards | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| M. Corral | 10 | 177.6 | 231 | 326 | 14 | 70.9 | 3337 | 29 | 91 | 333.7 |
| J. Plumlee Jr. | 7 | 196.6 | 5 | 7 | 0 | 71.4 | 65 | 1 | 37 | 9.3 |

## RECEIVING

| RECEIVING | GP | No. | Yards | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| E. Moore | 8 | 86 | 1193 | 13.9 | 8 | 91 | 149.1 |
| K. Yeboah | 8 | 27 | 524 | 19.4 | 6 | 68 | 65.5 |
| D. Drummond | 10 | 25 | 417 | 16.7 | 7 | 48 | 41.7 |

## RUSHING

| RUSHING | GP | Att. | Gain | Loss | Net | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| J. Ealy | 9 | 147 | 785 | 40 | 745 | 5.1 | 9 | 39 | 82.8 |
| M. Corral | 10 | 112 | 618 | 112 | 506 | 4.5 | 4 | 27 | 50.6 |
| S. Conner | 10 | 93 | 447 | 26 | 421 | 4.5 | 8 | 34 | 42.1 |

## DEF. LEADERS

Tackles: J. Jones 75, K. Smith 64, A.J. Finley 62
Tackles for loss: S. Williams 8, R. Anderson 7, L. Henry 5
Sacks: S. Williams 4, C. Johnson 3, R. Anderson 2.5
Interceptions: A.J. Finley 3, K. Smith 1, J. Haynes 1, O. Reese 1

# 247SPORTS REBELS RECRUITING 2021

## 3 NEWCOMERS OF IMPACT

### Brandon Buckhaulter

Buckhaulter was rated as a three-star prospect in the 20221 signing class by 247Sports, but early returns indicate he could prove to be the steal of the entire group. With a 6-foot-3, 210-pound frame, more-than-adequate speed, soft hands and an element of physicality about him, he could be the next in what has developed into a great lineage of pass catchers at Ole Miss in recent years. He'll be involved as a true freshman this fall.

### Isaiah Iton

The nation's No. 1 junior college defensive tackle according to the 247Sports Composite index, Iton was one of 18 mid-year enrollees for the Rebels. With spring practice under his belt, he is positioned to start and make an instant impact on an Ole Miss defensive line that struggled more often than not last year. The 6-4, 295-pounder is a beast on the interior and athletic enough to pull spot duty on the edge.

### Chance Campbell

Campbell earned honorable mention All-Big Ten honors a season ago before he entered the portal, eventually transferring to Ole Miss. He is expected to provide an immediate dose of physicality to the Rebels' linebackers corps, as well as push a couple of salty veterans for major playing time and perhaps even a starting role. His 11 tackles per game for the Terrapins last season ranked 12th in the FBS.

## SLEEPER

### Tysheem Johnson

All the former four-star prospect Tysheem Johnson did in the spring was impress at every turn. The mid-year enrollee proved to be out-of-the-package ready in a critical need area, as Ole Miss tries to rebuild what was an ailing secondary last season. Johnson is athletic, smooth, hard hitting and an effective communicator on the field. He could emerge as one of the Rebels' top defenders this fall.

## 2022 NEEDS

Ole Miss needs a high school tight end that can spend a few years in Lane Kiffin's offense, which demands productivity from the position. You can never have enough wide receivers in Kiffin's and coordinator Jeff Lebby's spread attack. On the other side of the football, there always seems to be a deficiency in depth along the defensive line.

— By David Johnson, Rebels247.com

## 247SPORTS COMPOSITE

| 0 | 6 | 19 | 0 |
|---|---|---|---|
| ✪✪✪✪✪ | ✪✪✪✪ | ✪✪✪ | ✪✪ |

| | |
|---|---|
| Committments | 25 |
| Average Stars | 3.24 |
| Total Stars | 81 |
| National Rank: 17 | SEC: 6 |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Luke Altmyer** | QB | 6-2 | 195 | ✪✪✪✪ | Starkville | Starkville |
| 247Sports.com rated among Top 5 players in Mississippi… As a senior, had 1,653 yards passing and 16 touchdowns… Had more than 3,000 yards passing as a junior with a 67 percent completion rate… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game. | | | | | | |
| **Kyndrich Breedlove** | DB | 6-0 | 175 | ✪✪✪ | Nashville, TN | Pearl-Cohn |
| Had 26 tackles (14 solo) and one interception as a senior… Had 74 tackles and two interceptions in final three seasons… Helped team to consecutive state championships in 2017 and 2018. | | | | | | |
| **Braion Brown** | WR | 6-3 | 185 | ✪✪✪ | Miramar, FL | St. Thomas Aquinas |
| As a junior, had 16 receptions for 289 yards… Helped team to state championship… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game. | | | | | | |
| **Markevious Brown** | DB | 6-0 | 170 | ✪✪✪ | Pahokee, FL | IMG Academy |
| Ranked No. 28 cornerback nationally and No. 55 player in Florida by 247Sports.com. | | | | | | |
| **Brandon Buckhaulter** | WR | 6-3 | 210 | ✪✪✪ | Flowood | Hartfield Academy |
| Had 35 receptions for 627 yards and nine touchdowns as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Erick Cade** | OL | 6-6 | 320 | ✪✪✪ | Denton, TX | Braswell |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 88 offensive tackle nationally. | | | | | | |
| **Caden Costa** | K | 6-2 | 200 | ✪✪✪ | Mandeville, LA | Mandeville |
| Ranked No. 7 kicker nationally and No. 53 player in Louisiana by 247Sports.com… Made 30 of 42 career field goal attempts… Made 178 of 181 career point after touchdown attempts. | | | | | | |
| **Marcus (MJ) Daniels** | DB | 6-3 | 200 | ✪✪✪✪ | Lucedale | George County |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 10 athlete nationally and No. 4 player in Mississippi… As a junior, had 23 tackles and four interceptions… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game. | | | | | | |
| **Qua Davis** | WR | 6-1 | 210 | ✪✪✪ | Biggersville | Itawamba CC |
| Ranked No. 22 junior college player and No. 4 junior college wide receiver nationally by 247Sports.com… Had 34 receptions for 583 yards and seven touchdowns in five games in 2020… As a freshman, had 258 yards receiving and two touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Jamond Gordon** | DE | 6-4 | 270 | ✪✪✪ | Meridian | East Mississippi CC |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 1 junior college defensive tackle nationally… 2020 season cancelled due to COVID… As a freshman, had 21 tackles, including 6.5 tackles for loss. | | | | | | |
| **Jibran-Jimmie (JJ) Hawkins** | DE | 6-3 | 245 | ✪✪✪ | Lawrenceville, GA | Discovery |
| Had 12 quarterback sacks, one interception, two fumbles caused and one fumble recovered as a senior… As a junior, scored five rushing touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Javious (JJ) Henry** | WR | 5-11 | 165 | ✪✪✪ | McKinney, TX | McKinney North |
| As a junior, had 76 receptions for 1,419 yards… Had more than 1,500 all-purpose yards and 18 touchdowns… Had 33 receptions for 356 yards and four touchdowns as a sophomore… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game. | | | | | | |
| **Isaiah Iton** | DT | 6-4 | 295 | ✪✪✪ | Houston, TX | Hutchinson (KS) CC |
| Ranked No. 10 junior college player and No. 2 junior college defensive tackle nationally by 247Sports.com… 2020 season moved to Spring 2021… Had 20 tackles, including 1.5 tackles for loss, and one quarterback sack as a freshman at South Dakota. | | | | | | |
| **Dink Jackson** | DB | 6-1 | 175 | ✪✪✪ | Key West, FL | Eau Gallie |
| As a senior, had 42 tackles, including 10 tackles for loss, and four quarterback sacks… Had 182 career tackles, 20 quarterback sacks, six fumbles caused, eight fumbles recovered, 45 quarterback hurries and scored 12 touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Tysheem Johnson** | DB | 5-10 | 195 | ✪✪✪✪ | Philadelphia, PA | Neumann Goretti |
| 247Sports.com rated among Top 15 players in Pennsylvania. | | | | | | |
| **Tywone Malone** | DT | 6-4 | 300 | ✪✪✪✪ | Oradell, NJ | Bergen Catholic |
| Ranked No. 62 player nationally and No. 1 player in New Jersey by 247Sports.com… Had 111 career tackles, including 28 tackles for loss, and 14 quarterback sacks… Missed most of senior season due to knee injury… Had 54 tackles, including 16 tackles for loss, and seven quarterback sacks as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Cedrick Nicely** | OL | 6-5 | 315 | ✪✪✪ | Gainesville, GA | Gainesville |
| As a senior, had 15 pancake blocks, 23 knockdown blocks and 60 perfect plays. | | | | | | |
| **Micah Pettus** | OL | 6-8 | 315 | ✪✪✪✪ | Madison, AL | James Clemens |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 92 offensive tackle nationally and No. 42 player in Alabama… Had 116 pancake blocks as a senior and 75 as a junior… Didn't allow a quarterback sack or quarterback hurry in high school career. | | | | | | |
| **Taleeq Robbins** | DT | 6-3 | 305 | ✪✪✪ | Philadelphia, PA | Imhotep Charter |
| Ranked No. 35 defensive tackle nationally and No. 21 player in Pennsylvania by 247Sports.com… As a junior, had 40 tackles, including six tackles for loss, three quarterback sacks, two fumbles caused and one fumble recovered. | | | | | | |
| **Elijah Sabbatini** | DB | 6-1 | 195 | ✪✪✪ | Biloxi | Biloxi |
| Had 93 tackles as a junior… Had 238 yards receiving, averaging 23.8 yards per reception. | | | | | | |
| **DeMarcus Smith** | DT | 6-4 | 270 | ✪✪✪ | Birmingham, AL | A.H. Parker |
| Ranked No. 50 strongside defensive end nationally and No. 31 player in Alabama by 247Sports.com. | | | | | | |
| **Trey Washington** | DB | 5-11 | 190 | ✪✪✪ | Trussville, AL | Hewitt-Trussville |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 90 cornerback nationally and No. 40 player in Alabama… Helped team to 9-2 record in 2020… Had seven career interceptions and 46 passes broken up. | | | | | | |
| **Demarko Williams** | DB | 5-11 | 185 | ✪✪✪ | Atlanta, GA | Westlake |
| Ranked No. 61 cornerback nationally by 247Sports.com. | | | | | | |
| **Jayden Williams** | OL | 6-5 | 270 | ✪✪✪ | Conway, AR | Conway |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 40 offensive tackle nationally and No. 3 player in Arkansas… Had 11 receptions for 177 yards in final two seasons. | | | | | | |
| **Hudson Wolfe** | TE | 6-6 | 235 | ✪✪✪✪ | Savannah, TN | Hardin County |
| Ranked No. 1 player in Tennessee by 247Sports.com… Missed senior season due to injury… As a junior, had 25 receptions for 381 yards and nine touchdowns. | | | | | | |

# PLAYER PROFILE

## Navy Transfer Springer Just Wants to Contribute

Navy transfer defensive back Jake Springer will be a key piece to any improvement on the Ole Miss defense.

The question is where on the chess board will he land?

There's a chance Springer could start at strong safety as he did in the Grove Bowl, the intrasquad game at the end of spring practice. If he does, he'll replace a two-year starter in Jon Haynes.

But Springer could start in any number of spots, depending on defensive play-calls at the beginning of the game.

Ole Miss coach Lane Kiffin believes more bodies on defense — 14 new signees, plus transfers, plus seniors returning for an extra season — could boost the turnaround.

"You've got to be able to rotate and be two-deep at all positions. It used to be just defensive line," Kiffin said. "If we're able to develop two-deep at all positions, where we feel really good about it, we'll be way better. We won't have guys like last year playing 70 or 80 snaps a game."

To that end, sitting out the 2020 season was a plus for Springer.

He made a big splash at Navy with 16 tackles for loss and eight sacks in 2019, but new surroundings also mean a period of acclimation.

Being challenged each day by Elijah Moore was also a plus.

"In my mind I lined up every morning against the best receiver in the draft. Now playing against other wide receivers in the SEC the game will slow down a little bit," he said. "Transitioning from another conference, I was able to work on my technique and get comfortable with new schemes. Last year was awesome."

In the spring Springer was usually the boundary safety in a variety of different packages. At times he was the Rover in a three-safety look.

He's one of a host of newcomers who are expected to play key roles on a defense trying to be better than the 2020 unit that gave up 519.0 yards a game.

DB
JAKE SPRINGER
Photo by courtesy of Ole Miss Athletics

Springer has set modest goals for his final season of college football. He just wants to help with the turnaround.

"We're going to need all of us to back each other up. We're going to be getting a lot of reps," he said. "My goal is to help however I can and make plays when they come to me. I want the defense to get stops, to play with more confidence and aggression than it did last year."

For more coverage visit lindyssports.com/college-football/sec/olemiss

# BEST AND BRIGHTEST

## MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

### QB MATT CORRAL

Corral brings a potential elite element at quarterback. … A verbal commit to USC and Florida at various times Corral, from Ventura, Calif., finally signed with Ole Miss under former coach Matt Luke. … When Luke hired Rich Rodriguez as OC, the new style did not play to Corral's passing strengths. … Under Lane Kiffin and Jeff Lebby last year, Corral led the nation in total offense (384.3 ypg) and finished fifth in passing efficiency (177.6).

## EMERGING STAR

### DB OTIS REESE

The Georgia transfer was called the best player on the defense by Lane Kiffin last August. The problem was Reese had not been cleared by the NCAA. … He was finally ruled eligible and played in three games totaling 25 tackles, an interception and a pass breakup. … Now with greater chemistry with teammates and knowledge of defensive schemes, he's poised for a huge season. … A four-star prospect from Leesburg, Ga., Reese appeared in 25 games with his home-state school.

## TOP NEWCOMER

### DT TYWONE MALONE

Ole Miss co-defensive coordinator Chris Partridge made a recruiting impact on the East Coast, the prize being Malone, a coveted big man with athleticism and a 300-plus frame. … Malone, the No. 62 player on the 247Sports Composite list, chose Ole Miss over USC, Texas A&M and many others. … Malone is a two-sport athlete and will also play baseball at Ole Miss. … He was not an early enrollee but is expected to be worked into the mix quickly in August.

# Family farms. Family meals.

Luke Smelley
2020 Alabama
Catfish Farmer of the Year

Terry Kruse
2020 Arkansas
Catfish Farmer of the Year

Will Noble
2020 Mississippi
Catfish Farmer of the Year

U.S. FARM-RAISED
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100% AMERICAN

U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish comes from local freshwater ponds, where our American farmers adhere to the strictest standards. It isn't easy, but that's what it takes to earn the U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish seal. Look for it in your grocery store freezer or local restaurants. Explore our recipes at **UScatfish.com.**

# MISSISSIPPI STATE BULLDOGS

For more coverage of the Bulldogs, visit mississippistate.247Sports.com

**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Mike Leach **DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Zack Arnett **STADIUM:** Davis-Wade Stadium: 61,337

## BULLDOGS SEEK IMPROVEMENT IN LEACH'S SECOND YEAR

If previous records indicate anything, Mike Leach and Mississippi State could see significant improvements this fall.

Leach is entering his second season as head coach of the Bulldogs. His first year did not go as planned, with Mississippi State finishing a measly 4-7 at the bottom of the SEC West.

But consider what Leach did in his second seasons at Texas Tech (2001) and Washington State (2013).

In his first season as the head coach at Texas Tech, Leach's squad went 7-6 and 0-4 against ranked opponents. In 2001, the Red Raiders finished 7-5, but faced a tougher schedule and went 2-3 against teams in the Top 25, with both wins coming by double digits. Then they came close to capping the season with an Alamo Bowl win against Iowa, losing 19-16.

When he took over at Washington State, his team finished 3-9 overall, 0-4 against ranked opponents, and was outscored by nearly 14 points per game. In 2013, his Washington State team went 6-7, made a bowl game, and went 1-3 against ranked opponents. His signature Air Raid offense also increased by 10 points per game.

That same improvement can be made this year in Starkville.

Not only does Mississippi State return seven starters on each side of the ball, but Leach just pulled in the best recruiting class he's ever had in his 19 seasons as a head coach.

Leach never had a signing class inside the Top 25 rankings at either Texas Tech or Washington State, and the best class he ever signed with the Cougars was ranked No. 42.

This past season, Mississippi State signed the No. 26 recruiting class in the nation, according to the 247Sports Composite rankings.

That includes four four-star signees, a four-star receiver transfer, and former five-star safety Jalen Green who transferred in from Texas.

Mississippi State will also play its toughest games of the season at home, including Alabama, LSU and Ole Miss, and MSU will play four non-conference games after playing an SEC-only slate in 2020.

Leach and company should see plenty of improvement.

### OFFENSE

Sophomore quarterback Will Rogers ended the 2020 season as the future of the Mississippi State program, but Leach made quite a few additions to the quarterback room this offseason.

Rogers, as a true freshman last year, played in nine games and started the last six games of the season. He went 3-3 during his starts and looked to be the clear frontrunner this year. That was until Leach recruited two three-star transfers, as well as incoming freshman four-star Sawyer Robertson, the highest-rated quarterback to sign with Mississippi State since 2003.

Jack Abraham, from Southern Miss, and Chance Lovertich, from South Alabama, both transferred to Mississippi State this offseason. While Rogers still repped all spring with the starters, Abraham made a serious push to be considered next season's starter.

"I think the quarterback position is wide open," Leach said after the spring game. "Whoever can move the ball down the field the best is in the end going to be the quarterback here."

Abraham started for three seasons at Southern Miss and passed for 7,067 yards and 41 touchdowns across 27 games. He performed well this spring with MSU and finished his spring game debut by completing 23 of 34 passes for 162 yards and two touchdowns.

Robertson joins the quarterback competition as a summer enrollee and can also make a push for playing time.

At running back, Jo'quavious Marks and Dillon Johnson will continue to play as a tandem. Marks will serve as more of an elusive pass-catching back, while Johnson serves more as the power back and receives carries on short-down opportunities. Marks caught 60 passes last season, including 10 vs. Arkansas, taking advantage of chances in the Air Raid attack.

Both players can play in either role as they did at times last year, and they help

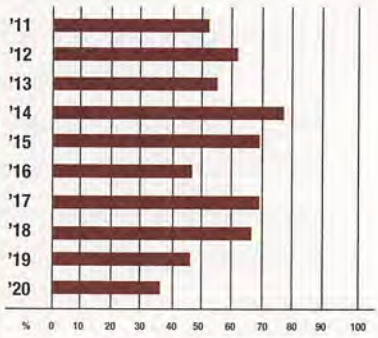
## SCHEDULE

| Date | Opponent | '20 Record |
|---|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | Louisiana Tech | 5-5 |
| Sept. 11 | NC STATE | 8-4 |
| Sept. 18 | at Memphis | 8-3 |
| Sept. 25 | LSU | 5-5 |
| Oct. 2 | at Texas A&M | 9-1 |
| Oct. 16 | ALABAMA | 13-0 |
| Oct. 23 | at Vanderbilt | 0-9 |
| Oct. 30 | KENTUCKY | 5-6 |
| Nov. 6 | at Arkansas | 3-7 |
| Nov. 13 | at Auburn | 6-5 |
| Nov. 20 | TENNESSEE STATE | 2-5 |
| Nov. 25 | OLE MISS | 5-5 |

## RESULTS

| 4-7, 3-7 | | |
|---|---|---|
| W | at LSU | 44-34 |
| L | ARKANSAS | 14-21 |
| L | at Kentucky | 2-24 |
| L | TEXAS A&M | 14-28 |
| L | at Alabama | 0-41 |
| W | VANDERBILT | 24-17 |
| L | at Georgia | 24-31 |
| L | at Ole Miss | 24-31 |
| L | AUBURN | 10-24 |
| W | MISSOURI | 51-32 |
| ARM FORCES BOWL | | |
| W | vs. Tulsa | 28-26 |

## 10-YEAR WINNING TREND



## AT A GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Starkville, Miss.

**2020:** 4-7 overall, 3-7 SEC (T-6th, West)

**COACH:** Mike Leach — At Mississippi State: 4-7, 1 year; overall: 143-97, 19 years

**RETURNING STARTERS:**
16; 7 offense, 7 defense, kicker, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:**
QB Will Rogers, RB Jo'quavious Marks, WR Jaden Walley, OT Charles Cross, DE Jaden Crumedy, LB Aaron Brule, CB Martin Emerson Jr., CB Emmanuel Forbes

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:**
Mississippi State's defense will be headlined by two of the best cornerbacks in the SEC in Emerson and Forbes on each side. The defensive staff will continue to generate pressure on opposing QBs with talented defensive linemen and the blitz-happy Brule at linebacker.

**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:**
Mississippi State gave up an SEC-high 34 sacks last year, which helped lead to an SEC-high 18 interceptions between the two quarterbacks, which, in turn, led to shockingly low point totals for a Leach team. Better line play will be key to running this in the SEC.

**KEY LOSSES:**
LB Erroll Thompson, DL Kobe Jones, DL Marquiss Spencer, WR Osirus Mitchell, WR JaVonta Payton, RB Kylin Hill, S Marcus Murphy, TE Geor'quarius Spivey

**OVERVIEW:**
Mike Leach's Air Raid offense always improves in Year 2, and it should again in Starkville with a lot of experience returning on the offensive line and at the skill positions. The Bulldogs showed last year that they will play hard against every team, especially on defense, and finished well by winning their final two games of the year.

**KEY NUMBER:**
**84** Mississippi State turned the ball over 25 times last season, which resulted in 84 points off turnovers, or 7.6 points off turnovers per game. MSU lost three games by one possession last year.

**WR**
**Jaden WALLEY**

Photo by AP Photo/Brynn Anderson

QB

**Will Rogers**

Photo by Matt Bush-USA TODAY Sports

## SCOUTING REPORT: Offense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | **Will Rogers*** | So. | Has to work on extending drives. | Jack Abraham, Sr. |
| RB | **Jo'quavious Marks*** | So. | Led the nation in receptions by a running back. | Dillon Johnson, So. |
| WR | **Jaden Walley*** | So. | Finished last season with four 100-yard games. | Rufus Harvey, Fr. |
| WR | **Austin Williams*** | Sr. | Needs to create more yards after catch. | Lideatrick Griffin, So. |
| WR | **Malik Heath*** | Sr. | Was held to two catches or less four times last year. | Caleb Ducking, Jr. |
| WR | Makai Polk | Jr. | California transfer needs to make instant impact. | Brad Cumbest, Jr. |
| LT | **Charles Cross*** | So. | Highly ranked for the 2022 NFL Draft. | Nick Jones, Jr. |
| LG | LaQuinston Sharp | Sr. | Needs to be better with 1-on-1 block attempts. | Grant Jackson, Fr. |
| C | **Cole Smith*** | Jr. | Improved snap consistency is a must. | Reed Buys, So. |
| RG | Kwatrivous Johnson | Jr. | Needs to be quicker at covering ground. | Carson Williams, Jr. |
| RT | Scott Lashley | Sr. | Alabama transfer was injured all of last season. | Kameron Jones, Jr. |
| PK | **Brandon Ruiz*** | Sr. | One of the best kickoff guys in the nation. | Scott Goodman, Jr. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

## SCOUTING REPORT: Defense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | Randy Charlton | Jr. | UCF transfer needs to make instant impact. | Jordan Davis, Sr. |
| DT | Cameron Young | Jr. | Will be used to plug the hole in the middle. | Nathan Pickering, Jr. |
| DE | **Jaden Crumedy*** | Jr. | Needs to generate more pressure in backfield. | Izuchukwu King Ani, So. |
| LB | **Tyrus Wheat*** | Sr. | Great at getting behind the line of scrimmage. | Sherman Timbs, Sr. |
| LB | Nathaniel Watson | Jr. | Replacing four-year starter Erroll Thompson at MLB. | Jett Johnson, Jr. |
| LB | **Aaron Brule*** | Jr. | Led nation in QB hurries from a LB in 2020. | Rodney Groce Jr., Fr. |
| CB | **Martin Emerson*** | Jr. | Allowed only one touchdown in 2020. | Decamerion Richardson, So. |
| CB | **Emmanuel Forbes*** | So. | Led the SEC with five interceptions last year. | Esaias Furdge, Jr. |
| BS | Dylan Lawrence | So. | Will be used in both blitzing and coverage. | **Shawn Preston, Jr.*** |
| SS | **Collin Duncan*** | Jr. | Needs to improve in coverage to take away deep ball. | C.J. Morgan, Sr. |
| FS | Jalen Green | Sr. | Texas transfer who scored defensive TD in spring game. | Janari Dean, Fr. |
| P | **Tucker Day*** | Sr. | Averaging 41.5 yards per punt across three years. | Scott Goodman, Jr. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

relieve pressure off the aggressive Air Raid offense.

Mississippi State had some receivers transfer out of the program this offseason, but more came in and whoever starts at quarterback has some already established receivers to throw to.

The best receiver from last year, the elusive Jaden Walley, returns after recording four-consecutive 100-yard receiving games to end last year. Austin Williams also returns on the inside as MSU's main third-down and possession receiver.

Malik Heath returns on the outside after catching three touchdown passes last year, and newcomer Makai Polk looks to start on the other side. Polk had 36 catches and three touchdowns across two years with the California Golden Bears.

The offensive line is headlined by left tackle Charles Cross, who has garnered attention as one of the top NFL prospects for the 2022 NFL Draft. He is joined by returning starter Cole Smith at center, while both LaQuinston Sharp and Kwatrivous Johnson played significant time at guard last year.

Right tackle will be manned by Scott Lashley, a former four-star transfer from Alabama who sat out last season due to injury.

## DEFENSE

While Mississippi State's offense struggled heavily at times last year, defensive coordinator Zach Arnett and his signature 3-3-5 defense remained a staple throughout the season.

Arnett's defense is designed to apply pressure on opposing quarterbacks, and that's exactly what the Bulldogs did last season. Mississippi State sacked opposing quarterbacks 25 times in 11 games, good for sixth-best in the conference.

This year, MSU should be able to dial it up just as well, if not better, with linebacker Aaron Brule leading the charge.

Brule led all FBS linebackers in quarterback hurries (27) and total pressures generated (39). He recorded 77 tackles, including 8.5 for loss and four sacks. He will be joined in the linebacker corps by Nathaniel Watson at middle linebacker and returning starter Tyrus Wheat.

Watson is replacing Erroll Thompson, who recorded more than 300 tackles in his Mississippi State career.

Only one starter returns along the defensive line — Jaden Crumedy. The Bulldogs will have to replace Kobe Jones and Marquiss Spencer. Spencer was one of two MSU players drafted this year.

Crumedy will start at one defensive end spot, while UCF transfer Randy Charlton is poised to start on the other side. Charlton had 12.5 tackles for loss and four sacks in his three-year career at UCF.

There should be many faces in a rotation at defensive tackle. Nathan Pickering returns after opting out of last season, while Cameron Young can also pose as a big body in the middle of the line. Jevon Banks plays

## TOP 5 NFL PROSPECTS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Charles Cross** | **OT** | **6-5** | **305** | **5.03** | **So.** |

Cross, in his third college season, is the total prospect at left tackle. Blessed with long arms and a thick frame, he still has plenty of room to pack on a few more pounds of muscle in an NFL weight room. Cross engages well, demonstrates sound footwork and gets out into the open field well. He also appears to have prototypical size and wingspan for a tackle. Cross gets down field well, engages efficiently and plays to the whistle.

Oh, but did we say last year was his first as a starter for the Bulldogs? Cross, a redshirt freshman a year ago, was a Freshman All-SEC selection last year and projects to be an All-SEC selection this season, if his development continues on an anticipated pace at left tackle. Cross is a first-round pick in the making, with the type of athleticism that could see him go in the top 10 of the 2022 NFL Draft.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2. Aaron Brule** | **OLB** | **6-1** | **235** | **4.72** | **Jr.** |
| **3. Jaden Crumedy** | **DT** | **6-5** | **310** | **5.08** | **Jr.** |
| **4. Martin Emerson** | **CB** | **6-2** | **195** | **4.57** | **Jr.** |
| **5. Esaias Furdge** | **CB** | **6-0** | **185** | **4.59** | **Jr.** |

— Ric Serritella, NFL Draft Bible

all over the defensive line and could also see playing time on the interior.

Mississippi State's secondary is where the most progress can be made this year.

Martin Emerson Jr. and Emmanuel Forbes will anchor both cornerback spots, and both should be two of the top defensive backs in the SEC. Emerson allowed only one touchdown catch all of last season and was ranked No. 3 in the SEC in coverage grade (82.9) by PFF. He is a feisty cornerback and is not afraid to get in a receivers face.

Forbes jumped into the starting lineup last season just two games in and was named a Freshman All-American after he led the SEC with five interceptions and led the nation with three interceptions returned for touchdowns.

At safety, former five-star prospect Jalen Green transferred in from Texas and will make an instant impact. Collin Duncan, Dylan Lawrence, Shawn Preston and C.J. Morgan will likely serve as a revolving door at the other safety positions.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

For the first time in a long time, Mississippi State felt comfortable running out its kicker at any point of last season. Brandon Ruiz transferred in from Arizona State before the start of last season and quickly won the starting job.

He showed why during the regular season and was a perfect 24 of 24 on PATs and finished 10 of 12 on field goal attempts, only missing a 40-yard attempt against Auburn and a 56-yarder against Kentucky.

He also was one of the nation's best at kickoffs, as 37 of his 43 attempts went for touchbacks.

Tucker Day will handle punting duties this season after splitting reps last year. He has punted 127 times across three years, averaging 41.5 yards per attempt. He has placed 32 of his punts inside the 20 and has two career punts over 70 yards.

Photo by Joe Robbins

## SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

Mississippi State's schedule looks promising for Leach's second year at the helm.

After playing only conference games last year, MSU starts the season with back-to-back non-conference home games against Louisiana Tech and NC State before hitting the road to play Memphis for the first time since 2011. Mississippi State has won 11 straight against Memphis.

Like last season, Mississippi State opens the conference slate against LSU, and that's just the beginning of a brutal three-game stretch that also includes Texas A&M and Alabama.

MSU's two SEC East opponents are Vanderbilt and Kentucky, and MSU will play its last two games of the year at home against Tennessee State and Ole Miss. The Battle for the Golden Egg will be back on Thanksgiving this season, after the rivalry game was moved off the date during 2020.

— Dalton Middleton

### 2018 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 28.5 | 67 |
| Rushing | 223.6 | 20 |
| Passing | 173.8 | 111 |
| Total | 397.4 | 70 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 13.2 | 2 |
| Rushing | 95.1 | 2 |
| Passing | 168.0 | 7 |
| Total | 263.1 | 1 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 7 | + 0.54 | 26 |

### 2019 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 27.6 | 74 |
| Rushing | 220.6 | 21 |
| Passing | 179.5 | 109 |
| Total | 400.1 | 70 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 28.8 | 74 |
| Rushing | 152.4 | 59 |
| Passing | 246.8 | 97 |
| Total | 399.2 | 73 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 1 | + 0.08 | T-57 |

### 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 21.4 | 109 |
| Rushing | 43.9 | 127 |
| Passing | 296.3 | 20 |
| Total | 340.2 | 104 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 28.1 | 58 |
| Rushing | 126.4 | 23 |
| Passing | 263.4 | 105 |
| Total | 389.7 | 52 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 7 | - 0.64 | 109 |

# NOTEBOOK

Offensive lineman **Scott Lashley** is back from injury and should make an instant impact this year as a starter.

Lashley, a former four-star offensive tackle from West Point High School just 20 miles from Mississippi State, initially signed with Alabama in 2016. After three seasons with the Crimson Tide, Lashley returned to Starkville as a graduate transfer and was immediately eligible to play.

That didn't happen, however, as Lashley was sidelined for the year after suffering an injury and undergoing season-ending surgery.

He took advantage of the NCAA's extra year of eligibility and is expected to start at right tackle, replacing **Kameron Jones**, who started six games.

Lashley should immediately help Mississippi State's offensive line, which gave up an SEC-high 34 sacks last year. He will help anchor a solid offensive tackle group with five-star **Charles Cross** starting at left tackle across from him.

Jones will continue to earn reps as offensive line coach **Mason Miller** said this spring that the Bulldogs have six linemen who will rotate in and out, and he hopes to get to eight players.

• Mississippi State's most dynamic receiver, **Jaden Walley**, will also be coming back from injury when the Bulldogs take the field this fall. Walley, who led the team with 718 receiving yards last year, was injured in Mississippi State's spring game.

He was hurt on a run play and was unable to put weight on his leg as he was helped off the field. Walley's mom confirmed with 247Sports that the sophomore sprained his MCL in the game.

• Quarterbacks **Will Rogers** and **Jack Abraham** stole the show this spring in the quarterback room, but Mike Leach says the competition is still wide open with **Sawyer Robertson** coming in this summer.

Robertson, a four-star quarterback out of Texas, was the highest-rated recruit in Mississippi State's 2021 recruiting class and is the highest-rated quarterback to sign with the Bulldogs since 2003. He is a summer enrollee.

He will play both baseball and football at MSU, and the quarterback is used to a pass-happy offense. At Coronado high school, he passed for 12,148 yards, 146 touchdowns and only 22 interceptions in four years.

# BULLDOGS SPRING ROSTER

| Quarterback | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16 Jack Abraham | QB | 6-0 | 205 | Sr. | Oxford |
| 3 Daniel Greek | QB | 6-4 | 225 | Fr. | Argyle, TX |
| 13 Jack Kristofek | QB | 6-4 | 190 | So. | Dallas, TX |
| 6 Chance Lovertich | QB | 5-11 | 190 | Sr. | Brandon |
| 12 Tyler Pogue | QB | 6-3 | 210 | Sr. | Batesville |
| 2 Will Rogers | QB | 6-2 | 205 | So. | Brandon |
| 19 Justin Stolberg | QB | 6-1 | 195 | Sr. | Covington, LA |
| **Running Back** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 32 J.J. Jernighan | RB | 5-11 | 210 | Jr. | Amory |
| 23 Dillon Johnson | RB | 6-0 | 215 | So. | Greenville |
| 21 Jo'quavious Marks | RB | 5-10 | 195 | So. | Atlanta, GA |
| 39 Jacquez Terrell | RB | 5-9 | 190 | Jr. | Columbia, SC |
| 33 Omni Wells | RB | 5-10 | 195 | Sr. | Moss Point |
| **Wide Receivers** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 88 Carson Banks | WR | 5-10 | 170 | Sr. | Brandon |
| 87 Bo Brooks | WR | 6-1 | 185 | Jr. | Madison |
| 25 Brad Cumbest | WR | 6-5 | 230 | Jr. | Hurley |
| 17 Caleb Ducking | WR | 6-5 | 200 | Jr. | Rolling Fork |
| 24 Christian Ford | WR | 5-11 | 170 | Jr. | Atlanta, GA |
| 5 Lideatrick Griffin | WR | 5-10 | 180 | So. | Philadelphia |
| 82 Rufus Harvey | WR | 5-10 | 165 | Fr. | Starkville |
| 4 Malik Heath | WR | 6-3 | 215 | Sr. | Jackson |
| 86 Jordon Hoyer | WR | 6-0 | 195 | Sr. | Fairburn, GA |
| 89 Brodie King | WR | 5-10 | 185 | Jr. | Biloxi |
| 0 JaVonta Payton | WR | 6-1 | 180 | Sr. | Nashville, TN |
| 10 Makai Polk | WR | 6-3 | 200 | Jr. | Richmond, CA |
| 11 Geor'quarius Spivey | WR | 6-5 | 230 | Jr. | Monroe, LA |
| 83 Quinton Torbor | WR | 6-1 | 190 | So. | Destrehan, LA |
| 31 Jaden Walley | WR | 6-0 | 180 | So. | D'Iberville |
| 85 Austin Williams | WR | 6-3 | 200 | Sr. | Ocean Springs |
| 20 Trip Wilson | WR | 6-2 | 195 | Fr. | Tupelo |
| **Offensive Lineman** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 51 Reed Buys | OL | 6-4 | 290 | So. | Vicksburg |
| 67 Charles Cross | OL | 6-5 | 305 | So. | Laurel |
| 52 Grant Jackson | OL | 6-6 | 310 | Fr. | Brookhaven |
| 69 Kwatrivous Johnson | OL | 6-7 | 325 | Jr. | Greenwood |
| 70 Ramble Johnson | OL | 6-4 | 280 | Jr. | Purvis |
| 58 Kameron Jones | OL | 6-5 | 300 | Jr. | Starkville |
| 66 Nick Jones | OL | 6-3 | 285 | Jr. | Byhalia |
| 78 Scott Lashley | OL | 6-7 | 315 | Sr. | West Point |
| 75 Calvin McMillian | OL | 6-5 | 305 | Fr. | Houston |
| 76 Albert Reese IV | OL | 6-7 | 315 | Fr. | Edmonton, Alberta |
| 60 William Ryland | OL | 6-2 | 280 | So. | Fairhope, AL |
| 63 LaQuinston Sharp | OL | 6-3 | 305 | Sr. | Columbus |
| 57 Cole Smith | OL | 6-3 | 305 | Jr. | Pontotoc |
| 77 Cordavien Suggs | OL | 6-6 | 315 | Sr. | Jackson |
| 50 Britain Virden | OL | 6-3 | 280 | Fr. | Greenville |
| 55 Ronald Webster | OL | 6-4 | 280 | Fr. | Hopewell, VA |
| 74 Carson Williams | OL | 6-5 | 285 | Jr. | Forest |
| 65 JT Zakkak | OL | 6-3 | 290 | Fr. | Gulfport |

| Defensive Lineman | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 92 Jevon Banks | DE | 6-2 | 290 | Fr. | Olive Branch |
| 5 Randy Charlton | DE | 6-3 | 265 | Jr. | Goulds, FL |
| 90 Armondous Cooley | DT | 6-2 | 300 | Fr. | Shubuta |
| 94 Jaden Crumedy | DT | 6-5 | 310 | Jr. | Hattiesburg |
| 6 Jordan Davis | DE | 6-4 | 265 | Sr. | Memphis, TN |
| 15 Jack Harris | DE | 6-3 | 260 | So. | Sumrall |
| 4 Izuchukwu King Ani | DE | 6-4 | 265 | So. | Hendersonville, TN |
| 95 Allen Love | DT | 6-2 | 285 | Jr. | Birmingham, AL |
| 59 Terry Mareus | DT | 6-0 | 275 | Fr. | Fort Lauderdale, FL |
| 17 Aaron Odom | DE | 6-3 | 275 | Sr. | Jackson |
| 22 Nathan Pickering | DT | 6-4 | 315 | Jr. | Mount Olive |
| 34 Sherman Timbs | DE | 6-2 | 265 | Sr. | Indianola |
| 93 Cameron Young | DT | 6-3 | 310 | Jr. | Crosby |
| **Linebackers** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 3 Aaron Brule | LB | 6-1 | 235 | Jr. | New Orleans, LA |
| 54 Rodney Groce Jr. | LB | 6-2 | 245 | Fr. | Pleasant Grove, AL |
| 43 Nick Jarrett | LB | 6-3 | 220 | Jr. | Harvest, AL |
| 44 Jett Johnson | LB | 6-2 | 235 | Jr. | Tupelo |
| 50 DeShawn Page | LB | 6-2 | 225 | So. | Knoxville, TN |
| 9 De'Monte Russell | LB | 6-4 | 260 | So. | Jackson |
| 14 Nathaniel Watson | LB | 6-2 | 245 | Jr. | Maplesville, AL |
| 2 Tyrus Wheat | LB | 6-2 | 265 | Sr. | Amite, LA |
| **Defensive Backs** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 33 Armon Bean | CB | 6-3 | 205 | So. | Memphis, TN |
| 33 Nicholas Bouldin | S | 6-1 | 195 | Jr. | Madison |
| 20 Kyle Cass | CB | 6-2 | 200 | Jr. | New Orleans, LA |
| 8 Londyn Craft | S | 6-0 | 205 | Sr. | Rio Rancho, NM |
| 18 Janari Dean | S | 5-11 | 195 | Fr. | Batesville |
| 19 Collin Duncan | S | 6-0 | 205 | Jr. | Montgomery, AL |
| 1 Martin Emerson | CB | 6-2 | 195 | Jr. | Pensacola, FL |
| 13 Emmanuel Forbes | CB | 6-0 | 180 | So. | Grenada |
| 27 Esaias Furdge | CB | 6-0 | 185 | Jr. | Clarksdale |
| 0 Jalen Green | S | 6-1 | 195 | Sr. | Houston, TX |
| 35 Landon Guidry | S | 6-0 | 195 | Sr. | Spring Hill, TN |
| 36 Jay Jimison | CB | 6-0 | 200 | Sr. | Forest |
| 24 Dylan Lawrence | S | 6-4 | 205 | So. | George County |
| 29 C.J. Morgan | S | 6-0 | 205 | Sr. | Bossier City, LA |
| 38 Fred Peters | S | 5-10 | 205 | Sr. | Columbia |
| 12 Shawn Preston Jr. | S | 6-0 | 205 | Jr. | St. James, LA |
| 23 J.P. Purvis | S | 6-1 | 210 | So. | Pelahatchie |
| 21 Jaylon Reed | CB | 6-0 | 185 | Jr. | Olive Branch |
| 30 Decamerion Richardson | CB | 6-2 | 185 | So. | Cullen, LA |
| 41 Cody Swanson | S | 6-0 | 195 | So. | Madison |
| 32 Cam Threatt | CB | 6-0 | 170 | Fr. | Lewisburg |
| **Specialist** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 41 Colby Cox | LS | 6-1 | 235 | Fr. | Woodstock, GA |
| 37 Tucker Day | P | 6-0 | 215 | Sr. | Brentwood, TN |
| 48 Scott Goodman | K | 5-10 | 200 | Jr. | Brandon |
| 68 Hayes Hammond | LS | 5-10 | 205 | Fr. | Tupelo |
| 49 Aidan Martin | K | 6-1 | 215 | Fr. | Houston, TX |
| 91 Nolan McCord | K | 6-0 | 165 | Fr. | Lilburn, GA |
| 8 Brandon Ruiz | K | 5-10 | 180 | Sr. | Tempe, AZ |

# OPPOSING COACHES VIEW

• "A lot of people think Mike Leach is great, but in the SEC teams figured out how to stop the dink and dunk. He's got to come up with a run game and alternative pass game against eight-man drops. The eight-man drop killed them last year. It messes up all their routes. Everything for Leach on offense is spacing. If he (Leach) reads (zone) coverage, he runs space routes; if he reads man, he runs rub routes. …

• "The SEC plays more man (defense) than the Pac-12, so you've got to go to your second and third reads. I think Leach needs a more athletic guy to do that. His system is not very complicated. It's pitch and catch. That's his run game. I think Mississippi State needs to run more. Leach needs a more athletic quarterback, so the quarterback run game is more of a threat. And (Will) Rogers is a better athlete than some think."

# INDIVIDUAL STATS

## PASSING

| NAME | GP | Effic | Cmp | Att | Int | Pct | Yards | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| W. Rogers | 9 | 123.5 | 239 | 346 | 7 | 69.1 | 1976 | 11 | 51 | 219.6 |
| K.J. Costello | 6 | 114.6 | 134 | 209 | 11 | 64.1 | 1283 | 6 | 75 | 213.8 |

## RECEIVING

| RECEIVING | GP | No. | Yards | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| J. Marks | 11 | 60 | 268 | 4.5 | 0 | 19 | 24.4 |
| J. Walley | 11 | 52 | 718 | 13.8 | 2 | 51 | 65.3 |
| O. Mitchell | 11 | 47 | 505 | 10.7 | 4 | 43 | 45.9 |

## RUSHING

| RUSHING | GP | Att. | Gain | Loss | Net | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| J. Marks | 11 | 70 | 325 | 13 | 312 | 4.5 | 3 | 28 | 28.4 |
| D. Johnson | 11 | 51 | 231 | 6 | 225 | 4.4 | 4 | 11 | 20.5 |

## DEF. LEADERS

Tackles: E. Thompson 96, A. Brule 77, M. Emerson 72
Tackles for loss: A. Brule 8.5, M. Spencer 8, T. Wheat 6
Sacks: T. Wheat 5, A. Brule 4, E. Thompson 3, M. Spencer 3
Interceptions: E. Forbes 5, C. Duncan 2, four tied with 1

# 247SPORTS BULLDOGS RECRUITING 2021

## 3 NEWCOMERS OF IMPACT

### Jalen Green

The top offseason priority for Mississippi State was adding more experience to the secondary. The Bulldogs did just that with the addition of Green, a Texas transfer. Green brings starting experience to Mississippi State and could line up at free safety or aid the cornerback depth as well.

### Randy Charlton

Mississippi State also lost a pair of starting defensive ends off the 2020 roster in Kobe Jones and Marquiss Spencer. Charlton, a Central Florida transfer, helped fill one of those voids. He has the size to fit in nicely at strong-side defensive end in the Bulldogs' scheme.

### Theodore Knox

Head coach Mike Leach puts a premium on receivers each recruiting cycle and that trend has continued at Mississippi State. Knox was one of several Texas high school products the Bulldogs inked in the Class of 2021, and he is considered one of the fastest players in the class.

## SLEEPER

### Jacobi Moore

The Bulldogs signed other highly-rated receivers in the 2021 class, but Moore may have more upside than any of them. Despite missing five games with an injury, Moore still totaled 838 receiving yards and 10 touchdowns as a senior. He possesses a nice blend of length and speed.

## 2022 NEEDS

The top recruiting priorities for Mississippi State's Class of 2022 mainly center around defensive backs, particularly cornerbacks, and the offensive line. The Bulldogs only signed one high school cornerback in the Class of 2021 in Jay Hampton and he mostly played receiver in high school.

In Mike Leach's air-raid system, he still needs to find those long and athletic offensive linemen to fit the passing sets. That process got underway in the 2021 class, but the Bulldogs need more in the 2022 class.

— By Paul Jones, 247Sports

## 247SPORTS COMPOSITE

| 0 | 5 | 18 | 0 |
|---|---|---|---|
| ✪✪✪✪✪ | ✪✪✪✪ | ✪✪✪ | ✪✪ |

| | |
|---|---|
| Committments | 23 |
| Average Stars | 3.22 |
| Total Stars | 74 |
| National Rank: 26 | SEC: 10 |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Deonte Anderson** | DL | 6-3 | 225 | ✪✪✪✪ | Fort Meade, FL | Fort Meade Senior |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 14 defensive end nationally and No. 25 player in Florida… As a senior, had 32 tackles, including seven tackles for loss, two quarterback sacks, two fumbles caused and two fumbles recovered. | | | | | | |
| **Canon Boone** | OL | 6-4 | 280 | ✪✪✪ | Kemah, TX | Dickinson |
| Ranked No. 66 offensive tackle nationally and No. 110 player in Texas by 247Sports.com… Helped team rush for 1,768 yards and 27 touchdowns as a senior. | | | | | | |
| **Gabe Cavazos, Jr.** | OL | 6-4 | 280 | ✪✪✪ | Lake Cormorant | Lake Cormorant |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 20 player in Mississippi… As a senior, helped team to 1,695 yards rushing… Helped team to 2,002 yards rushing and 27 touchdowns as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Randy Charlton** | DL | 6-3 | 265 | ✪✪✪ | Goulds, FL | University of Central Florida |
| Appeared in 10 games with five starts in both 2019 and 2020. | | | | | | |
| **Ty Cooper** | DL | 6-4 | 245 | ✪✪✪ | Louisville | Louisville |
| Ranked No. 60 defensive end nationally and No. 17 player in Mississippi by 247Sports.com… Had 211 career tackles, including 66 tackles for loss, 22 quarterback sacks, three fumbles caused, four fumbles recovered, and two interceptions… Had 112 tackles, including 40 tackles for loss, and 12 quarterback sacks as a senior. | | | | | | |
| **Corey Ellington** | DB | 6-3 | 180 | ✪✪✪ | Lexington | Holmes County Central |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 25 player in Mississippi… As a senior, had 76 tackles, including six tackles for loss, four quarterback sacks, and one fumble caused… Had 30 receptions for 387 yards and three touchdowns… Had 75 yards rushing and one touchdown. | | | | | | |
| **Daniel Greek** | QB | 6-4 | 225 | ✪✪✪ | Argyle, TX | Liberty Christian School |
| Ranked No. 38 pro-style quarterback nationally by 247Sports.com… Completed 267 of 445 passes for 2,580 yards and 26 touchdowns in 15 games over sophomore and junior seasons. | | | | | | |
| **Jalen (Jay) Green** | DB | 6-1 | 195 | ✪✪✪✪ | Houston, TX | Texas |
| As a junior in 2020, appeared in nine games with one start… Appeared in 10 games with seven starts as a sophomore, missing three games due to injury… Had 46 career tackles and seven passes broken up. | | | | | | |
| **Jay Hampton** | DB | 6-2 | 175 | ✪✪✪ | Amory | Amory |
| Had 50 receptions for 1,066 yards and 11 touchdowns as a senior… As a junior, had 28 receptions for 930 yards and 11 touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Nick Jones** | OL | 6-3 | 285 | ✪✪✪ | Byhalia | East Mississippi CC |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 9 junior college offensive tackle nationally… 2020 season cancelled due to Covid-19… As a freshman, helped team average 457.4 yards total offense and 34.8 points per game. | | | | | | |
| **Teddy Knox** | WR | 5-11 | 170 | ✪✪✪✪ | Baton Rouge, LA | The Woodlands (TX) |
| Had 35 receptions for 635 yards and four touchdowns as a senior… Had 102 yards rushing and one touchdown on seven carries… Returned one punt for touchdown… As a junior, had 550 all-purpose yards and two touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **John Lewis** | LB | 6-3 | 220 | ✪✪✪✪ | Canton | Germantown |
| Ranked No. 21 linebacker nationally and No. 6 player in Mississippi by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had 84 tackles, 13 quarterback sacks, four fumbles caused and two fumbles recovered… Had 53 tackles and five quarterback sacks as a junior. | | | | | | |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Tre'von Marshall** | DL | 6-4 | 215 | ✪✪✪ | McDonough, GA | Locust Grove |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 78 defensive end nationally… Had 65 tackles, including 11 tackles for loss, four quarterback sacks and five quarterback hurries as a senior… As a junior, had 51 tackles, including 11.5 tackles for loss and five quarterback sacks. | | | | | | |
| **Nic Mitchell** | LB | 6-2 | 215 | ✪✪✪ | Jacksonville, FL | Mandarin |
| As a senior, had 97 tackles, including 17.5 tackles for loss, 8.5 quarterback sacks, two fumbles caused and two fumbles recovered, returning one for a touchdown… Had 60 tackles (41 solo), including two tackles for loss, and one interception as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Jacobi Moore** | WR | 6-2 | 200 | ✪✪✪ | Gulfport | Harrison Central |
| Ranked No. 9 player in Mississippi by 247Sports.com… Had 43 receptions for 831 yards and 10 touchdowns as a senior, despite missing four games with an injury… As a junior, had 22 receptions for 403 yards and five touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **DeShawn Page** | LB | 6-2 | 225 | ✪✪✪ | Knoxville, TN | East Mississippi CC |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 27 junior college player and No. 4 junior college inside linebacker nationally…2020 season cancelled due to Covid… As a freshman, had 36 tackles, including two tackles for loss, one fumble caused and one fumble recovered. | | | | | | |
| **Makai Polk** | WR | 6-3 | 200 | ✪✪✪ | Richmond, CA | University of California |
| Appeared in four games with two starts as a sophomore in 2020… As a freshman, appeared in 13 games with five starts… Had 16 receptions for 276 yards and two touchdowns in final five games of the season. | | | | | | |
| **Simeon Price** | RB | 6-0 | 210 | ✪✪✪ | Pensacola, FL | West Florida |
| As a senior, had 16 receptions for 265 yards and two touchdowns… Had 93 yards rushing and one touchdown on 10 carries… Had 18 receptions for 292 yards as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Albert Reese, IV** | OL | 6-7 | 315 | ✪✪✪ | Alberta, CAN | Clearwater (FL) Acad. |
| Helped team average 512 yards per game, including 245 yards rushing, as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Sawyer Robertson** | QB | 6-4 | 200 | ✪✪✪✪ | Lubbock, TX | Coronado |
| Ranked No. 10 pocket passer nationally and No. 22 player in Texas by 247Sports.com… Completed 813 of 1,265 career passes attempted for 11,302 yards and 135 touchdowns… Had 475 career rushing yards and 12 touchdowns… As a senior, had 3,663 yards passing and 47 touchdowns with five interceptions. | | | | | | |
| **Timar Rogers** | LB | 6-1 | 195 | ✪✪✪ | Deland, FL | Deland |
| Had 41 tackles (26 solo), including 15 tackles for loss, eight quarterback sacks, one fumble caused, one fumble recovered, and one interception as a senior… As a junior, had 40 tackles, including four tackles for loss, and three quarterback sacks. | | | | | | |
| **Rara Thomas** | WR | 6-2 | 190 | ✪✪✪ | Eufaula, AL | Eufaula |
| As a senior, had 55 receptions for 945 yards and 13 touchdowns… Had 45 receptions for 957 yards and 14 touchdowns as a junior… Did not play football prior to his junior year. | | | | | | |
| **Carson Williams** | OL | 6-5 | 285 | ✪✪✪ | Forest | Mississippi Gulf Coast CC |
| 247Sports. rated No. 81 junior college player and No. 7 junior college offensive tackle nationally… Helped team to state championship as a high school senior. | | | | | | |

# PLAYER PROFILE

## Blitz-Happy Brule Taking On Leadership Role

Aaron Brule has sat and learned from some of Mississippi State's great linebackers in his short career, but now the blitz-happy junior is taking the reins of the defense for himself.

Brule, who joined Mississippi State in 2018, has been in the locker room with former MSU linebackers Willie Gay and Erroll Thompson. Both are now in the NFL, and Brule is left in charge of yet another talented linebacker room.

He's not used to having to be a vocal leader. Gay, who was drafted in the second round of the 2020 NFL Draft, was in charge of the room for Brule's first two seasons.

Last year, Thompson led the room. Thompson went undrafted in the 2021 NFL Draft but was a four-year starter who accumulated over 300 career tackles.

Now, Brule is stepping up after only one year of playing experience.

"All of the guys that came before me, the Willie Gays and the Erroll Thompsons, they just paved the way for me and I'm just taking off where they left off and attacking it how they would, which is with an aggressive approach and taking everybody along with me," Brule said of being a leader.

Brule doesn't have the storied career that Gay and Thompson had when they were the defensive leaders. Brule was a special teams player before starting last season.

He played in four games in 2018 before redshirting and then played little on defense in 2019. He played in all 13 games, but only recorded 11 tackles, with 1.5 for loss and one sack.

But in 2020, defensive coordinator Zach Arnett came in and implemented his 3-3-5 defense. Brule flourished in it.

Brule started all 11 games and recorded 77 total tackles, with 8.5 for loss and four sacks. He excelled at getting to the quarterbacks and proved to be the best linebacker in the nation at generating pressure.

He led all linebackers in the country in pass rush snaps (192), total generated pressures (39) and quarterback hurries (27). He was a big part of the Mississippi State defense ranking No. 6 in the SEC in sacks and No. 4 in total defense.

And he did that while being the clear-cut No. 2 linebacker. He's now the leader of the defense and is planning on continuing to wreak havoc in opposing backfields while leading the charge.

LB
AARON BRULE
Photo by Joe Robbins

**For more coverage visit lindyssports.com/college-football/sec/mississippistate**

# BEST AND BRIGHTEST

## MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

### LB AARON BRULE

There are numerous offensive possibilities for MVP with Mike Leach's Air Raid offense, but the heart and soul of Mississippi State football has always been the defense. And with that, Aaron Brule is taking over as the leader of MSU's defense. … The former special teams player earned a starting role last season and recorded 77 tackles, including 8.5 for loss and four sacks. … He was also one of the nation's best at pressuring opposing quarterbacks.

## EMERGING STAR

### RB JO'QUAVIOUS MARKS

Running backs are often overlooked in Mike Leach's Air Raid, but Marks showed serious promise last year catching the ball out of the backfield. … Marks led the country in catches by a running back. He recorded 60 catches for 268 yards, but also saw more time in the run game late in the season with 70 attempts for 312 yards and three touchdowns.

## TOP NEWCOMER

### QB JACK ABRAHAM

He transferred to Mississippi State this offseason after spending three years at Southern Miss. The senior has passed for 7,067 yards, 41 touchdowns and 29 interceptions in his career. Abraham was 23 of 34 passing for 162 yards and two touchdowns in the MSU spring game.

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# MISSOURI TIGERS

For more coverage of the Tigers, visit missouri.247Sports.com

**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Eliah Drinkwitz **DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Steve Wilks **STADIUM:** Memorial Stadium/Faurot Field: 71,004

## TIGERS AIM TO MAKE UP GROUND IN DRINKWITZ'S SECOND YEAR

Close the gap. That was the most common phrase around Missouri this spring.

There is no mystery behind the meaning. In Eli Drinkwitz's first year on campus, the Tigers finished alone in third place in the top-heavy SEC East, their best East finish since winning the division in 2013 and 2014.

Mizzou finally edged Kentucky for the first time in five years, and while South Carolina, Tennessee and Vanderbilt rebuild through coaching changes, the Tigers understand there's still a chasm between their program and the division's kingpins, Georgia and Florida.

For all the positive steps Mizzou took in Drinkwitz's debut season — against a rugged SEC-only schedule and, at times, with a depleted roster — the Tigers were barely competitive for long stretches against the two best teams in the division.

Florida throttled Mizzou, 41-17. Georgia was no less kind six weeks later, thumping the Tigers, 49-14. The Gators and Bulldogs nearly tripled Mizzou in offensive yardage in those games, piling up 1,129 yards to MU's 448.

That's the gap.

"We're always going to push, push, push, until we win the SEC East," Drinkwitz said as the Tigers started spring practices.

"So as soon as (last) season finished ... it was immediately for me, OK, we have areas that have to improve in order for us to close the gap on the upper echelon teams. How do we do that? Change is a part of this profession. It's a part of growth. It was an opportunity for us to improve."

For the Tigers, that offseason mission started on the defensive side. Drinkwitz has stopped short of saying he fired coordinator Ryan Walters, but he didn't get in his way from making a lateral move to Illinois to become Bret Bielema's defensive coordinator.

Drinkwitz wanted a more experienced coordinator to oversee a more versatile and disruptive defense. He went with longtime NFL coach Steve Wilks, who most recently served as the Cleveland Browns coordinator in 2019 and before that was the Arizona Cardinals' head coach in 2018.

The change wasn't just about new leadership. The Tigers produced an SEC-low nine takeaways and allowed 2.2 30-yard passes per game, second-worst in the conference.

"We needed to adjust," Drinkwitz said. "We needed to eliminate explosive plays, specifically in the pass game. We needed to be more multiple in our coverages. We had to affect the passer."

### OFFENSE

Unlike 2020, Drinkwitz goes into his second Missouri season with conviction at quarterback after watching Connor Bazelak take over the job in Week 3 and settle into the position.

The Tigers hope to squeeze more production out of the passing game — especially in the red zone — as Bazelak finds himself surrounded by more playmakers at receiver, notably Ohio State transfer Mookie Cooper, a natural in the slot, and speedy four-star freshman Dominic Lovett.

A deeper and more versatile receiver corps should boost a passing game that produced just nine touchdowns last year.

A team loaded with reliable possession receivers needed more home-run hitters at receiver after Missouri completed just eight 30-yard passes all season. With Drew Lock at QB from 2016-2018, the Tigers averaged nearly three 30-yard completions per game. Accuracy wasn't a problem for Bazelak, who completed 67.3 percent of his passes, but he spent the offseason sharpening his deep ball.

Bazelak developed chemistry with veteran outside receivers Tauskie Dove and Keke Chism last year. Jalen Knox was sidelined for the spring but can play inside or outside. Cooper, Lovett and redshirt freshman J.J. Hester could find ways to stretch the field vertically.

The Tigers haven't relied much on tight ends for passing game production, though Niko Hea emerged as the group's best receiver last year with 14 catches and two TDs.

Drinkwitz's offensive line is far more experienced with as many as four senior starters, including center Mike Maietti, one of several "super seniors" on the roster

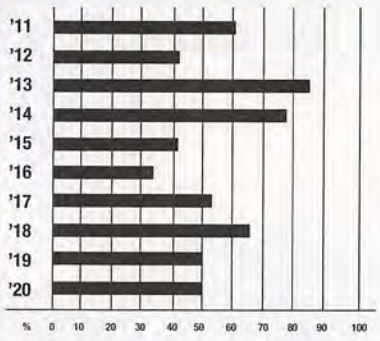
## SCHEDULE

| Date | Opponent | '20 Record |
|---|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | CENTRAL MICHIGAN | 3-3 |
| Sept. 11 | at Kentucky | 5-6 |
| Sept. 18 | S.E. MISSOURI STATE | 4-4 |
| Sept. 25 | at Boston College | 6-5 |
| Oct. 2 | TENNESSEE | 3-7 |
| Oct. 9 | NORTH TEXAS | 4-6 |
| Oct. 16 | TEXAS A&M | 9-1 |
| Oct. 30 | at Vanderbilt | 0-9 |
| Nov. 6 | at Georgia | 8-2 |
| Nov. 13 | SOUTH CAROLINA | 2-8 |
| Nov. 20 | FLORIDA | 8-4 |
| Nov. 26 | at Arkansas | 3-7 |

## RESULTS

| 5-5, 5-5 | | |
|---|---|---|
| L | ALABAMA | 19-38 |
| L | at Tennessee | 12-35 |
| W | LSU | 45-41 |
| W | KENTUCKY | 20-10 |
| L | at Florida | 17-41 |
| W | at South Carolina | 17-10 |
| W | VANDERBILT | 41-0 |
| W | ARKANSAS | 50-48 |
| L | GEORGIA | 14-49 |
| L | at Mississippi State | 32-51 |

## 10-YEAR WINNING TREND



## AT A GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Columbia, Mo.

**2020:** 5-5 overall, 5-5 SEC (3rd, East)

**COACH:** Eli Drinkwitz — At Missouri: 5-5, 1 year; overall: 17-6, 2 years

**RETURNING STARTERS:** 17; 8 offense, 7 defense, kicker, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:**
QB Connor Bazelak, RB Tyler Badie, WR Mookie Cooper, C Mike Maietti, DE Trajan Jeffcoat, LB Devin Nicholson, CB Ennis Rakestraw Jr., S Martez Manuel

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:**
MU's OL gained valuable experience playing together last year and returns all but one player from the two-deep. Bazelak is a year older in Drinkwitz's system, has more playmakers around him and has a high ceiling. The DL is deep and experienced. PK Harrison Mevis has a powerful, accurate leg.

**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:**
Can Badie and Elijah Young replace Larry Rountree III's production in the running game? Does Bazelak have vertical threats who can stretch the defense? Who's the leader of the defense in Nick Bolton's absence? The average margin of defeat in Mizzou's five losses last season was 24 points.

**KEY LOSSES:**
RB Larry Rountree III, RT Larry Borom, DT Markell Utsey, LB Nick Bolton, S Joshuah Bledsoe, S Tyree Gillespie

**OVERVIEW:**
In some ways Drinkwitz's second year at Mizzou feels like it's his first year after navigating through last year's pandemic challenges. With new pieces around an established quarterback, the Tigers should produce a more potent offense. Last year's promising .500 finish against an SEC-only schedule suggests Mizzou's chances of closing the gap on Georgia and Florida could hinge on the new defensive staff and scheme under the first-year coordinator.

**KEY NUMBER:**
**24** The average margin of defeat in Mizzou's five losses last season to Alabama, Tennessee, Florida, Georgia and Mississippi State.

DL
Trajan
JEFFCOAT

Photo by Jay Biggerstaff-USA TODAY Sports

RB

**Tyler Badie**

Photo by Denny Medley USA TODAY Sports

## SCOUTING REPORT: Offense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **QB** | **Connor Bazelak*** | So. | Co-SEC Freshman of Year looking to sharpen deep ball. | Brady Cook, Fr. |
| RB | Tyler Badie | Sr. | Versatile veteran out to prove he can have bigger workload. | Elijah Young, So. |
| **WR** | **Keke Chism*** | Sr. | Former Division II transfer is a reliable possession receiver. | Jalen Knox, Sr. |
| **WR** | **Tauskie Dove*** | Jr. | Showed great hands early, struggled some with drops late. | Dominic Lovett, Fr. |
| WR | Mookie Cooper | Fr. | Dynamic Ohio State transfer can operate in slot or backfield. | Barrett Banister, Sr. |
| **TE** | **Daniel Parker Jr.*** | Sr. | Proven blocker, but had only eight catches in seven games in '20. | Niko Hea, Jr. |
| **LT** | **Zeke Powell*** | Sr. | Needs to clean up penalties, showed promise on left edge. | Javon Foster, Jr. |
| **LG** | **Xavier Delgado*** | Jr. | Slowed by ankle injury last year; must hold off Luke Griffin. | Luke Griffin, So. |
| **C** | **Mike Maietti*** | Sr. | Sturdy anchor; team-high 732 snaps from scrimmage last year. | Drake Heismeyer, Fr. |
| **RG** | **Case Cook*** | Sr. | Veteran leader up front, didn't allow any sacks in 2020. | E.J. Ndoma-Ogar, So. |
| RT | Hyrin White | Sr. | Missed all of 2020 with shoulder injury. | Bobby Lawrence |
| **PK** | **Harrison Mevis*** | So. | Showed great range, accuracy in strong freshman season. | Sean Koetting, Sr. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

## SCOUTING REPORT: Defense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **DE** | **Trajan Jeffcoat*** | Jr. | Earned first-team All-SEC honors, led MU with six sacks. | Chris Turner, Sr. |
| **DT** | **Kobie Whiteside*** | Sr. | Strong pass-rusher; missed half of 2020 with knee injury. | Darius Robinson, Jr. |
| **DT** | **Akial Byers*** | Sr. | Returned for second senior season, enjoyed strong spring. | Ben Key, Jr. |
| **DE** | **Isaiah McGuire*** | Jr. | Had 12 pressures last year, second among returning players. | Daniel Robledo, Jr. |
| **LB** | **Devin Nicholson*** | Jr. | Coming off solid first year as starter, sound tackler. | Cameron Wilkins, Jr. |
| LB | Chad Bailey | Jr. | Finally healthy, first in line to replace All-SEC Nick Bolton. | Blaze Alldredge, Sr. |
| **CB** | **Ennis Rakestraw Jr.*** | So. | Thrown into the fire as freshman; held his own against SEC WRs. | Chris Mills, Jr. |
| CB | Ish Burdine | So. | Needs to shore up coverage downfield after getting taste of action. | Jarvis Ware, Sr. |
| NB | Chris Shearin | So. | Opted out of 2020, earned first-team reps at nickel in the spring. | Stacy Brown, Jr. |
| **S** | **Martez Manuel*** | Jr. | Coming off breakout year: 64 tackles, seven TFLs, five PBUs. | Shawn Robinson, Sr. |
| S | J.C. Carlies | So. | Converted from cornerback, impressed new staff in the spring. | Jalani Williams, So. |
| **P** | **Grant McKinniss*** | Sr. | Kentucky transfer returned for second senior year. | Harrison Mevis, So. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

taking advantage of the extra year of eligibility the NCAA granted all players. The Tigers need to replace standout right tackle Larry Borom, a fifth-round pick by the Chicago Bears, and could turn to former starter Hyrin White, who missed all of 2020 with a shoulder injury.

A committee approach will have to replace Larry Rountree III's production in the running game.

Rountree, a sixth-round pick to the Chargers, left Mizzou with more rushing yards than any running back in team history, but Tyler Badie, a dangerous receiver out of the backfield or in the slot, believes he can be the best running back in the SEC. He should get plenty of chances to back up that bold statement, but others will get touches, especially Elijah Young.

One imperative is red-zone improvement. The Tigers completed only 11 passes with just three touchdowns inside the 20-yard line, putting more stress on the running game and kicker Harrison Mevis. Drinkwitz takes the fall for those struggles.

"Typically, it was my play-calling in the red area," he said. "I didn't give those guys a lot of opportunities to throw the football. I was probably too conservative. We had a really good running back, and you get in those areas you want to get away with points, so you want to hand the ball off to him."

## DEFENSE

Steve Wilks, Drinkwitz's new defensive coordinator, hasn't coached college in 15 years but brings both NFL coordinator and head-coaching experience to a defense that unraveled last season.

Wilks has installed a new scheme based on a one-gap four-man front and nickel base package. The Tigers will scrap their man-heavy coverage scheme for more zone concepts, which Wilks hopes increases the team's interceptions. MU picked off only four passes last year and has just six interceptions over its last 18 SEC games.

"They played a lot of man last year, which you saw really limited the amount of takeaways because our back is to the ball all the time," Wilks said. "Now, with zone eyes, being able to see (the field), going through the route progression, getting the jump on the quarterback, I've been very impressed with how quickly we've picked those things up."

He's not the only new defensive staffer. Jethro Franklin replaced Brick Haley to coach the defensive line, while Aaron Fletcher will coach defensive backs, replacing David Gibbs, who joined Gus Malzahn's staff at UCF.

Franklin's defensive line is loaded with experience after three seniors opted to take advantage of the extra year of eligibility: nose tackle Kobie Whiteside, defensive tackle Akial Byers and defensive end Chris Turner.

Trajan Jeffcoat is back after ranking among the SEC leaders with six sacks and should be Wilks' best edge rusher. Whiteside battled a knee injury last year but supplies a stout interior rush when healthy.

With Nick Bolton's departure to the NFL — the Chiefs drafted him in the second

## TOP 5 NFL PROSPECTS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Akial Byers** | **DT** | **6-4** | **305** | **5.15** | **Sr.** |

The talk around Byers is about his potential as a defensive tackle, not necessarily his production. He possesses ideal height, with a lean frame, and is nimble for his size. Viewed as more of a run stuffer than a pass rusher, Byers handles gap assignments well. At times plays a bit stiff, but he shows natural instincts and pursues the ball very well, as he is always moving even when engaged.

Playing on an experienced defensive line that returns every starter should help Byers showcase his skills this season. Over 41 games played at Mizzou, he has accumulated 56 career tackles, including 5.5 for loss from the interior defensive line. With some additional bulk and another solid season, Byers could be a candidate to possibly hear his name called on Day 2 of the draft.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2. Kobie Whiteside** | **DT** | **6-1** | **300** | **5.23** | **Sr.** |
| **3. Trajan Jeffcoat** | **DE** | **6-3** | **265** | **4.78** | **Jr.** |
| **4. Tyler Badie** | **RB** | **5-9** | **200** | **4.45** | **Sr.** |
| **5. Keke Chism** | **WR** | **6-4** | **210** | **5.23** | **Sr.** |

— Ric Serritella, NFL Draft Bible

**LB Devin Nicholson**

Photo by Jay Biggerstaff-USA TODAY Sports

round — Devin Nicholson is now MU's most seasoned linebacker. Who replaces Bolton? Rice graduate transfer Blaze Alldredge should be a contender, along with Chad Bailey, a career backup who's fought through injuries the last few years.

In the secondary, safety Martez Manuel and cornerback Ennis Rakestraw Jr. return after showing flashes of All-SEC potential as first-year starters.

J.C. Carlies joined the starting lineup at cornerback late last season as a freshman but quickly moved to free safety when the new defensive staff took over. Jarvis Ware is the team's most experienced cornerback, but missed all of spring practices while recovering from a knee injury. If healthy, he'll be in the mix along with Ish Burdine and Chris Mills, plus some freshmen, perhaps.

With five defensive backs on the field in most packages, Wilks will have to settle on a third safety or nickel back. Chris Shearin, who opted out early last season, had the early lead on that role in the spring.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

The Tigers return all three of their steady kicking specialists, led by kicker Harrison Mevis, who etched his name into Mizzou history with a game-winning field goal against Arkansas as time expired. Mevis was money all season, converting 17 of 20 field goal attempts and all of his PATs.

Punter Grant McKinniss, another super senior who came to MU last year from Kentucky, averaged 43.1 yards per punt.

Also back, and now on scholarship, is kickoff specialist Sean Koetting, who led the nation in touchback percentage at 88.5. The Tigers also return multiple long snappers with game experience.

Drinkwitz needs to settle on a punt returner after last year's unit coughed up several fumbles and rarely produced positive yards. Newcomers Cooper and Lovett could factor into those roles.

### 2018 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 36.6 | 18 |
| Rushing | 202.4 | 33 |
| Passing | 279.4 | 22 |
| Total | 481.8 | 13 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 25.5 | 50 |
| Rushing | 126.5 | 22 |
| Passing | 262.0 | 112 |
| Total | 388.5 | 62 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 1 | + 0.08 | 63 |

### 2019 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 25.3 | 93 |
| Rushing | 151.7 | 74 |
| Passing | 222.6 | 73 |
| Total | 374.3 | 93 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 19.4 | 16 |
| Rushing | 132.8 | 31 |
| Passing | 179.3 | 6 |
| Total | 312.0 | 14 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 1 | + 0.08 | T-53 |

### 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 26.7 | T-78 |
| Rushing | 135.2 | 91 |
| Passing | 266.8 | 32 |
| Total | 402.0 | 59 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 32.3 | 85 |
| Rushing | 162.2 | 61 |
| Passing | 245.8 | 84 |
| Total | 408.0 | 66 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 5 | - 0.50 | T-97 |

## SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

After last year's grueling SEC-only slate, the Tigers are happy to play a normal schedule, which includes four manageable non-conference games.

Three come at home, starting with the opener against Central Michigan, then later visits from Southeast Missouri and North Texas. The lone non-conference road trip could be a tricky, a Week 4 visit to Boston College, one of seven Power 5 teams the Tigers have never played.

In SEC play, MU gets a pivotal Week 2 test at Kentucky. In Week 5, MU welcomes back former offensive coordinator Josh Heupel, now Tennessee's head coach. The bye week comes after a Week 7 visit from Texas A&M, followed by consecutive road trips to Vanderbilt and Georgia.

The home stretch is favorable with home games against South Carolina and Florida, ending with a Black Friday visit to Arkansas in the Battle Line Rivalry Game.

— Dave Matter

# NOTEBOOK

**Eli Drinkwitz** added a second former NFL head coach to his staff, hiring former St. Louis Rams head coach and veteran NFL and college coordinator **Scott Linehan** as an offensive analyst. Linehan was LSU's passing game coordinator in 2020. His son, **Matt Linehan**, is an offensive graduate assistant on Mizzou's staff.

• Two defensive linemen opted for an extra year of eligibility and will reunite with former Mizzou coach **Barry Odom**, now in his second year at Arkansas. Defensive end **Tre Williams**, who opted out of MU's season late last fall, first committed to Houston then chose Arkansas for his final year of eligibility. He'll be joined by former Mizzou teammate and defensive tackle **Markell Utsey**, who entered the transfer portal after MU's spring practices.

• In May, Drinkwitz gave most of his returning assistant coaches new two-year contracts through the 2022 season while promoting offensive line coach **Marcus Johnson** to assistant head coach and run game coordinator. Johnson was a potential target for the offensive line position at Ole Miss, his alma mater.

• As May began, the Tigers had seven verbal commitments for 2022 recruits, including five in-state prospects, led by four-star safety **Isaac Thompson** from St. Louis University High School. The Tigers' top pledge is four-star quarterback Sam Horn from Suwanee, Ga., widely hailed as one of the top pro-style passers in the 2022 class.

• In May, Drinkwitz spent a day at the state capital in Jefferson City to lobby lawmakers on behalf of legislation that will allow Mizzou athletes and their peers around the state to profit off their name, image and likeness without losing college eligibility. The bill passed through both chambers of the state legislature.

• Mizzou added four total games against Army and San Diego State, while rescheduling last year's canceled games against Louisiana and BYU, as well as rescheduling a future game at Colorado. MU added home games against Army in 2029 and 2033, plus a second home-and-away series against San Diego State in 2033 and 2034.

Last year's canceled home game against Louisiana was pushed back to 2025, while the game MU was scheduled to play at BYU will now take place in 2035.

# TIGERS SPRING ROSTER

| Quarterback | | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | Connor Bazelak | QB | 6-3 | 220 | So. | Dayton, OH |
| 12 | Brady Cook | QB | 6-3 | 220 | Fr. | St. Louis |
| 10 | Tyler Macon | QB | 6-0 | 200 | Fr. | St. Louis |
| 16 | Jack Samsel | QB | 6-2 | 200 | Jr. | Spanish Fort, AL |
| **Running Back** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 1 | Tyler Badie | RB | 5-9 | 200 | Sr. | Memphis, TN |
| 20 | Simi Bakare | RB | 5-11 | 210 | Sr. | Round Rock, TX |
| | Taj Butts | RB | 5-11 | 210 | Fr. | St. Louis |
| 35 | Michael Cox | RB | 6-0 | 220 | Fr. | Atlanta, GA |
| 28 | Dawson Downing | RB | 6-0 | 220 | Sr. | Mission, KS |
| | BJ Harris | RB | 5-11 | 195 | Fr. | Chattanooga, TN |
| 4 | Elijah Young | RB | 5-9 | 190 | So. | Knoxville, TN |
| **Wide Receivers** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 11 | Barrett Banister | WR | 6-0 | 200 | Sr. | Fayetteville, AR |
| 6 | Keke Chism | WR | 6-4 | 210 | Sr. | Daingerfield, TX |
| 5 | Mookie Cooper | WR | 5-10 | 185 | Fr. | St. Louis |
| 86 | Tauskie Dove | WR | 6-3 | 200 | Jr. | Denton, TX |
| 13 | Javian Hester | WR | 6-3 | 190 | Fr. | Tulsa, OK |
| 9 | Jalen Knox | WR | 6-0 | 196 | Sr. | Jonesboro, LA |
| 7 | Dominic Lovett | WR | 5-10 | 175 | Fr. | Belleville, IL |
| 18 | Chance Luper | WR | 6-2 | 180 | Fr. | North Richland Hills, TX |
| 19 | Jay Maclin | WR | 5-11 | 185 | Fr. | Kirkwood |
| 85 | Jaden Nash | WR | 5-10 | 190 | Fr. | Jacksonville, AR |
| 31 | D'ionte Smith | WR | 6-0 | 155 | Sr. | Kansas City |
| 2 | Micah Wilson | WR | 6-3 | 204 | Sr. | Tulsa, OK |
| **Tight Ends** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 45 | Kibet Chepyator | TE | 6-7 | 220 | Fr. | Carol Steam, IL |
| 88 | Logan Christopherson | TE | 6-6 | 255 | Sr. | Lemont, IL |
| 48 | Niko Hea | TE | 6-5 | 250 | Jr. | St. Louis |
| 81 | Shawn Hendershot | TE | 6-4 | 210 | Fr. | Overland Park, KS |
| | Ryan Hoerstkamp | TE | 6-4 | 230 | Fr. | Washington |
| | Gavin McKay | TE | 6-4 | 215 | Fr. | Memphis, TN |
| 82 | Daniel Parker Jr. | TE | 6-4 | 245 | Sr. | Kansas City |
| 80 | Messiah Swinson | TE | 6-7 | 255 | Jr. | Glen Head, NY |
| **Offensive Lineman** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 92 | Z'Core Brooks | OL | 6-5 | 245 | So. | Dallas, TX |
| 71 | D.J. Bullard | OL | 6-3 | 315 | So. | Fenton |
| 59 | Case Cook | OL | 6-5 | 300 | Sr. | Carrollton, GA |
| 72 | Xavier Delgado | OL | 6-5 | 320 | Jr. | Glendale, AZ |
| 76 | Javon Foster | OL | 6-6 | 310 | Jr. | West Bloomfield, MI |
| 54 | Luke Griffin | OL | 6-5 | 312 | So. | Chatsworth, GA |
| 57 | Steven Hardy | OL | 6-0 | 265 | Jr. | Raytown |
| 69 | Drake Heismeyer | OL | 6-3 | 283 | Fr. | St. Charles |
| 64 | Bobby Lawrence | OL | 6-8 | 320 | Jr. | St. Joseph |
| 55 | Michael Maietti | OL | 6-1 | 291 | Sr. | West Orange, NJ |
| | EJ Ndoma-Ogar | OL | 6-3 | 325 | So. | Allen, TX |
| 51 | Zeke Powell | OL | 6-5 | 295 | Sr. | Georgiana, AL |
| 65 | Trenton Sederwall | OL | 6-5 | 290 | So. | Ozark |
| 61 | Richard Taylor | OL | 6-4 | 300 | Jr. | Ellenwood, GA |
| | Connor Tollison | OL | 6-5 | 305 | Fr. | Jackson |
| 75 | Mitchell Walters | OL | 6-7 | 290 | So. | St. Louis |
| 50 | Hyrin White | OL | 6-6 | 315 | Sr. | DeSoto, TX |
| **Defensive Lineman** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 0 | Akial Byers | DL | 6-4 | 305 | Sr. | Fayetteville, AR |
| | Travion Ford | DL | 6-4 | 235 | Fr. | St. Louis |
| 91 | Realus George Jr. | DL | 6-2 | 305 | Jr. | Atlanta, GA |
| 28 | Jatorian Hansford | DL | 6-4 | 255 | Sr. | Forsyth, GA |
| 18 | Trajan Jeffcoat | DL | 6-3 | 265 | Jr. | Columbia, SC |
| | Jonathan Jones | DL | 6-4 | 240 | Fr. | McKinney, TX |
| 95 | Ben Key | DL | 6-3 | 285 | Jr. | Cranbourne West, AUS |
| 99 | Isaiah McGuire | DL | 6-5 | 280 | Jr. | Tulsa, OK |
| | Kyran Montgomery | DL | 6-5 | 255 | Fr. | Indianapolis, IN |
| 6 | Darius Robinson | DL | 6-6 | 295 | Jr. | Canton, MI |
| 56 | Daniel Robledo | DL | 6-4 | 285 | Jr. | Tucson, AZ |
| 93 | Andrew Serrano | DL | 6-4 | 240 | Fr. | Chicago, IL |
| 39 | Chris Turner | DL | 6-4 | 270 | Sr. | Hammond, LA |
| 9 | Markell Utsey | DL | 6-4 | 295 | Sr. | Little Rock, AR |
| | Arden Walker | DL | 6-4 | 248 | Fr. | Denver, CO |
| 15 | Johnny Walker. Jr. | DL | 6-3 | 204 | Fr. | Tampa, FL |
| 78 | Kobie Whiteside | DL | 6-1 | 300 | Sr. | Houston, TX |
| | Mekhi Wingo | DL | 6-1 | 275 | Fr. | St. Louis |
| 96 | Cannon York | DL | 6-3 | 235 | Jr. | Lebanon |
| **Linebackers** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| | Blaze Alldredge | LB | 6-2 | 220 | Sr. | Kissimmee, FL |
| 33 | Chad Bailey | LB | 6-0 | 230 | Jr. | Missouri City, TX |
| 36 | Joe Britton | LB | 6-1 | 225 | Sr. | Rogers, AR |
| | Zach Lovett | LB | 6-2 | 230 | Fr. | Rockledge, FL |
| 41 | Chance May | LB | 6-1 | 210 | Sr. | Kansas City |
| 16 | Gerald Nathan, Jr. | LB | 6-1 | 210 | Jr. | Charlotte, NC |
| 11 | Devin Nicholson | LB | 6-3 | 230 | Jr. | Detroit, MI |
| 22 | Will Norris | LB | 6-1 | 220 | So. | Columbia |
| 29 | Jamie Pettway | LB | 6-2 | 235 | So. | Albany, GA |
| 40 | Cameron Wilkins | LB | 6-2 | 235 | Jr. | Del Valle, TX |
| | Dameon Wilson | LB | 6-2 | 220 | Fr. | Grover, NC |
| **Defensive Backs** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 14 | Kris Abrams-Draine | CB | 5-11 | 179 | So. | Mobile, AL |
| 7 | Stacy Brown | DB | 6-2 | 212 | Jr. | Duncanville, TX |
| 24 | Ishmael Burdine | DB | 6-1 | 190 | So. | Slidell, LA |
| | Devyn Butler | CB | 5-11 | 190 | So. | Allen, TX |
| 17 | Jaylon Carlies | DB | 6-2 | 193 | So. | Winter Garden, FL |
| 13 | Daylan Carnell | DB | 6-2 | 195 | Fr. | Indianapolis, IN |
| 46 | Justin Efebera | DB | 6-0 | 185 | So. | Columbus, OH |
| 43 | Brandon Gregory Jr. | DB | 6-0 | 180 | Fr. | Kansas City |
| 26 | Aidan Harrison | DB | 6-3 | 200 | So. | New Lothrop, MI |
| | Tyler Hibbler | S | 6-1 | 185 | Fr. | St. Louis |
| | Darius Jackson | CB | 6-2 | 175 | Fr. | DeSoto, TX |
| 21 | Tyler Jones | DB | 5-11 | 185 | Fr. | Winter Garden, FL |
| 3 | Martez Manuel | S | 6-1 | 200 | Jr. | Columbia |
| 10 | Chris Mills | DB | 6-0 | 175 | Jr. | Converse, TX |
| 35 | Mason Pack | DB | 6-0 | 205 | Sr. | Springfield |
| | Jadarrius Perkins | CB | 6-2 | 190 | Jr. | Hattiesburg, MS |
| 2 | Ennis Rakestraw Jr. | DB | 6-0 | 170 | So. | Duncanville, TX |
| 30 | Zxaequan Reeves | CB | 6-3 | 185 | Fr. | Titusville, FL |
| 12 | Shawn Robinson | S | 6-2 | 220 | Sr. | DeSoto, TX |
| 5 | Chris Shearin | DB | 5-11 | 190 | So. | Suffolk, VA |
| | Davion Sistrunk | CB | 6-3 | 170 | Fr. | Melbourne, FL |
| 8 | Jarvis Ware | DB | 6-1 | 190 | Sr. | Apopka, FL |
| 4 | Jalani Williams | S | 6-2 | 195 | So. | St. Louis |
| **Specialist** | | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 93 | Luke Bauer | K | 6-5 | 190 | Fr. | St. Louis |
| 47 | Daniel Hawthorne | LS | 6-0 | 225 | So. | West Monroe, LA |
| 49 | Jake Hoffman | LS | 6-4 | 230 | Jr. | Kearney |
| 90 | Sean Koetting | PK | 6-3 | 230 | Sr. | Columbia |
| 19 | Grant McKinniss | P | 6-1 | 204 | Sr. | Findlay, OH |
| 92 | Harrison Mevis | K | 6-0 | 220 | So. | Warsaw, IN |

# OPPOSING COACHES VIEW

• "When Eli Drinkwitz was at NC State (as offensive coordinator), he was a very innovative offensive coach. At Missouri, his offense gave Alabama some technical issues, some schematic issues, but they didn't have the firepower. …

• "Their offensive line was average. Their quarterback was average in a lot of respects. Their skill was pretty good. I don't see the consistency to call (quarterback) Connor Bazelak anything above average. I can remember Missouri playing some good halves, but they never put it all together and played a complete game. They made untimely errors and self-inflicted wounds. They need to learn how to win in the SEC. In the SEC, you can't beat yourself, bottom line.

• "(Former coach) Gary Pinkel got Missouri to the SEC Championship Game twice, which is an indictment on the SEC East. Eli needs to get them back in that direction, because once you taste it, don't tell the fans you can't do it again."

# INDIVIDUAL STATS

## PASSING

| NAME | GP | Effic | Cmp | Att | Int | Pct | Yards | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| C. Bazelak | 10 | 132.1 | 218 | 324 | 6 | 67.3 | 2366 | 7 | 69 | 236.6 |
| S. Robinson | 5 | 133.9 | 20 | 29 | 0 | 69.0 | 185 | 1 | 54 | 37.0 |

## RECEIVING

| RECEIVING | GP | No. | Yards | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K. Chism | 9 | 35 | 458 | 13.1 | 1 | 29 | 50.9 |
| J. Knox | 9 | 31 | 305 | 9.8 | 0 | 27 | 33.9 |
| D. Hazelton | 9 | 30 | 397 | 13.2 | 1 | 33 | 44.1 |

## RUSHING

| RUSHING | GP | Att. | Gain | Loss | Net | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| L. Rountree | 10 | 209 | 1019 | 47 | 972 | 4.7 | 14 | 46 | 97.2 |
| T. Badie | 10 | 48 | 261 | 19 | 242 | 5.0 | 4 | 46 | 24.2 |
| J. Knox | 9 | 12 | 98 | 3 | 95 | 7.9 | 1 | 32 | 10.6 |

## DEF. LEADERS

Tackles: N. Bolton 95, D. Nicholson 82, M. Manuel 64
Tackles for loss: N. Bolton 7.5, M. Manuel 6.5, T. Jeffcoat 6
Sacks: T. Jeffcoat 6, I. McGuire 3, M. Manuel 2.5
Interceptions: D. Nicholson1, J. Bledsoe 1, J. Ware 1, S. Robinson 1

# 247SPORTS TIGERS RECRUITING 2021

## 3 NEWCOMERS OF IMPACT

### Dominic Lovett

It seems like these days if you want to win in the SEC, you need a dynamic receiver that can stretch the field, and the Tigers hope Lovett is just that. The Top247 wideout out of East St. Louis, Ill. originally committed to Arizona State before flipping to Missouri late.

### Jadarrius Perkins

Perkins was the nation's No. 3-ranked junior college cornerback according to 247Sports. He has the ideal frame at 6-foot-2, 185 pounds and all the traits to be an instant impact type of player for Missouri. The Mississippi native was on campus for spring practices.

### Realus George Jr.

It's not often that a player makes the transition from fullback to defensive tackle, but George did just that after leaving the University of Miami and spending a semester at a junior college. He gives the Tigers an interior pass rusher with a motor that runs hot.

## SLEEPER

### Davion Sistrunk

Davion Sistrunk is one of three defenders Missouri pulled out of Florida. The Melbourne Eau Gallie standout checks a lot of the boxes when it comes to scouting future NFL corners as he's long and has solid ball skills. He also can score on the basketball court and was a regional qualifier in the 110-meter hurdles.

## 2022 NEEDS

It will be interesting to see just how many in-state prospects Missouri can keep home in the 2022 cycle. The Tigers picked up a commitment early on from Top247 safety Isaac Thompson and are hoping to beat out Clemson for All-American cornerback Toriano Pride. Aside from continuing to fortify the secondary, Eli Drinkwitz and his assistants will look to add line-of-scrimmage players as there are needs there on both offense and defense. The staff will also do what it can to hang onto Top247 quarterback Sam Horn, who has announced in February that he plans to sign with Missouri.

— By Andrew Ivins, 247Sports

## 247SPORTS COMPOSITE

| 5★ | 4★ | 3★ | 2★ |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 7 | 18 | 0 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Commitments | 25 |
| Average Stars | 3.28 |
| Total Stars | 82 |
| National Rank: 28 | SEC: 11 |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Blaze Alldredge** | LB | 6-2 | 220 | ★★★ | Kissimmee, FL | Rice |
| Had 47 tackles in five games in 2020… In 2019, had 102 tackles, including 21.5 tackles for loss, and four quarterback sacks. | | | | | | |
| **Taj Butts** | RB | 5-11 | 210 | ★★★ | St. Louis | De Smet |
| As a senior, had 419 yards rushing and three receptions for 38 yards… Scored 18 touchdowns as a junior… Had 1,279 yards rushing on 131 carries… Helped team to state championship. | | | | | | |
| **Daylan Carnell** | DB | 6-2 | 195 | ★★★★ | Indianapolis, IN | Ben Davis |
| Played corner and wide receiver… Had 52 tackles, including one tackle for loss, and three interceptions as a senior… As a junior, had 23 receptions for 199 yards and one touchdown… Had five interceptions, including one returned for touchdown | | | | | | |
| **Mookie Cooper** | WR | 5-10 | 185 | ★★★★ | St. Louis | Ohio State |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 82 player and No. 15 wide receiver nationally out of high school… As a junior in 2018, had 29 receptions for 869 yards and nine touchdowns, helping team to state championship… Had more than 1,100 career yards of offense and scored 18 touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Travion Ford** | DE | 6-4 | 235 | ★★★★ | St. Louis | Lutheran North |
| Ranked No. 20 defensive end nationally and No. 4 player in Missouri by 247Sports.com… Had 28 tackles, including 13 tackles for loss, six quarterback sacks and one fumble recovered as a senior despite team playing just six games… Had 163 career solo tackles, 37 quarterback sacks, five fumbles recovered and scored four defensive touchdowns and two safeties. | | | | | | |
| **Realus George Jr.** | DT | 6-2 | 305 | ★★★ | Atlanta, GA | Independence CC |
| 247Sports rated No. 2 fullback nationally… As a high school senior, had 306 yards rushing and two touchdowns… In 2017, had 43 tackles, including 19 tackles for loss, and eight quarterback sacks. | | | | | | |
| **BJ Harris** | RB | 5-11 | 195 | ★★★ | Chattanooga, TN | McCallie School |
| Helped team to two consecutive state championships… Had 1,391 yards rushing and 20 touchdowns as a senior. | | | | | | |
| **Tyler Hibbler** | S | 6-1 | 185 | ★★★ | St. Louis | Trinity Catholic |
| As a senior, had 68 tackles, including eight tackles for loss, and four quarterback sacks… Had 61 tackles, including seven tackles for loss, three fumbles recovered and one interception as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Ryan Hoerstkamp** | TE | 6-4 | 230 | ★★★ | Washington | Washington |
| Had 18 receptions for 333 yards and seven touchdowns as a senior… As a junior, had 11 receptions for 267 yards and two touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Darius (DJ) Jackson** | CB | 6-2 | 175 | ★★★ | DeSoto, TX | Red Oak |
| Began playing corner as a junior… As a senior, helped team to 11-2 record. | | | | | | |
| **Jonathan (Jon) Jones** | DE | 6-4 | 240 | ★★★ | McKinney, TX | McKinney |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 36 strongside defensive end nationally… Had 55 tackles, including 16 tackles for loss, and six quarterback sacks as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Dominic Lovett** | WR | 5-10 | 175 | ★★★★ | Belleville, IL | East St. Louis |
| Ranked No. 34 wideout nationally and No. 5 player in Illinois by 247Sports.com… As a junior, had 73 receptions for 1,541 yards, averaging 21.1 yards per catch, and scored 16 touchdowns… No prep football in Illinois in 2020. | | | | | | |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Zach Lovett** | LB | 6-2 | 230 | ★★★ | Rockledge, FL | Rockledge |
| Had 93 tackles, including 15 tackles for loss, as a junior… Varsity linebacker all four years of high school. | | | | | | |
| **Tyler Macon** | QB | 6-0 | 200 | ★★★★ | St. Louis | East St. Louis |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 13 dual-threat quarterback nationally… As a junior, had 4,241 yards passing and 39 touchdowns… Had 827 yards rushing and 17 touchdowns… Led team to 14-0 record and state championship… Threw just seven interceptions on 314 pass attempts… No prep football in Illinois in 2020. | | | | | | |
| **Gavin McKay** | TE | 6-4 | 215 | ★★★ | Memphis, TNMemphis University School | |
| Ranked No. 22 player in Tennessee by 247Sports.com… Helped team to state championship game as a senior. | | | | | | |
| **Kyran Montgomery** | DE | 6-5 | 255 | ★★★ | Indianapolis, IN | Pike |
| Had 210 career tackles, including 33.5 tackles for loss… As a senior, had 60 tackles, including 8.5 tackles for loss, two quarterback sacks, and 11 quarterback hurries. | | | | | | |
| **EJ Ndoma-Ogar** | OG | 6-3 | 325 | ★★★★ | Allen, TX | Oklahoma |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 13 offensive guard nationally and No. 25 player in Texas out of high school. | | | | | | |
| **Jadarrius Perkins** | CB | 6-2 | 185 | ★★★ | Perkinston, MS | Mississippi Gulf Coast CC |
| Ranked No. 8 junior college player and No. 3 junior college cornerback nationally by 247Sports.com… Had 32 tackles, including one tackle for loss, one interception, and five passes broken up in 14 games over two years. | | | | | | |
| **Zxaequan (Snoop) Reeves** | CB | 6-3 | 185 | ★★★ | Titusville, FL | Cocoa |
| Had 12 tackles, nine passes deflected and one fumble caused as a senior… As a junior, had 27 tackles and returned an interception 52 yards for a touchdown. | | | | | | |
| **Daniel Robledo** | DE | 6-4 | 285 | ★★★ | Tucson, AZ | East Los Angeles College |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 1 junior college defensive end nationally… Had 35 tackles and four quarterback sacks as a freshman in 2019. | | | | | | |
| **Davion Sistrunk** | CB | 6-3 | 170 | ★★★ | Melbourne, FL | Eau Gallie |
| Ranked No. 56 cornerback nationally by 247Sports.com… Switched from basketball to football during junior season… As a junior, had 25 tackles and three interceptions. | | | | | | |
| **Connor (CJ) Tollison** | OL | 6-5 | 305 | ★★★★ | Jackson | Jackson |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 20 offensive tackle nationally and No. 2 player in Missouri… Helped team to 14-0 record and state championship as a senior… Helped team average 424.7 yards per game. | | | | | | |
| **Arden Walker** | DE | 6-4 | 248 | ★★★ | Denver, CO | Cherry Creek |
| Helped team to two consecutive state championships… As a senior, had 31 tackles, including 10 tackles for loss, and six quarterback sacks… Had 157 career tackles, including 21 tackles for loss, and 14 quarterback sacks. | | | | | | |
| **Dameon Wilson** | LB | 6-2 | 220 | ★★★ | Grover, NC | Kings Mountain |
| Had 123 tackles, including 16 tackles for loss, four quarterback sacks, nine passes deflected, five fumbles caused and three fumbles recovered as a junior… North Carolina did not allow prep football in 2020. | | | | | | |
| **Mekhi Wingo** | DL | 6-1 | 275 | ★★★ | St. Louis | De Smet |
| Ranked No. 37 defensive tackle nationally and No. 9 player in Missouri by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had 54 tackles, including 16 tackles for loss, five quarterback sacks, and one fumble recovered. | | | | | | |

# PLAYER PROFILE

## QB Bazelak to Lead the Way as a Sophomore

It only took Eli Drinkwitz a few series in the second game of 2020 to make a change at quarterback.

Connor Bazelak replaced Shawn Robinson in the first half at Tennessee, a move that proved to be permanent. By season's end, Bazelak earned co-SEC Freshman of the Year honors and had Tigers fans dreaming of more success in 2021.

There was plenty to like about Bazelak's redshirt freshman campaign. He showed unflinching poise in late-game situations in victories over LSU and Arkansas.

He proved his toughness, absorbing his share of minor injuries on hits in the pocket. His completion percentage of 67.3 was the best for MU's starting quarterback since the Chase Daniel years more than a decade ago. He finished 5-3 as a starter, including an epic performance in his first start, a 406-yard, four-touchdown day in a home upset of LSU.

Late in the year, Bazelak seemed to wear down some, throwing four of his six interceptions in the final two games against Georgia and Mississippi State, both losses. In his first offseason as the incumbent starter, he focused on downfield accuracy.

That's because on passes targeted 20 yards or more, he completed just 14 of 50 attempts for 416 yards, per Pro Football Focus. That percentage (28 percent) was more than 30 percentage points behind Alabama's Mac Jones, the league's standard-bearer for deep-ball accuracy last year.

"We've got to be better in our vertical passing game, throwing the ball downfield," Bazelak said. "I think the spring is a great time to practice that timing with receivers on deep balls."

Otherwise, there's nothing for Bazelak to prove this year. Robinson moved to safety late last season and plans to stay there this fall. Missouri's other scholarship quarterbacks, redshirt freshman Brady Cook and freshman Tyler Macon, are clearly angling for the No. 2 job.

Teammates described Bazelak as the clear leader of the offense.

QB
CONNOR BAZELAK
Photo by Denny Medley/USA TODAY Sports

"When I look at Connor I see a guy that's taken full control, especially going into year two," senior receiver Keke Chism said. "He's a confident guy. He has great leadership. He's definitely taking this team under his control. We're going to go as far as he carries us."

Drinkwitz, who serves as his own coordinator and QB coach, is allowing Bazelak to have more say in the offense.

"I told him, 'I buy the groceries. He cooks the meal,'" Drinkwitz said. "I'm just giving him the recipe and what he does with it is up to him."

**For more coverage visit lindyssports.com/college-football/sec/missouri**

## BEST AND BRIGHTEST

### MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

#### RB TYLER BADIE

Badie has never been a workhorse back, but he comes into 2021 with 1,136 career rushing yards and 72 career catches for 819 yards and 16 total touchdowns. … Led MU in receptions in 2019 and remained a pass-catching threat out of the backfield last year. … Should take on a larger role in the running game with Larry Rountree III off to the NFL. … After playing at 182 pounds last year, Badie added more than 20 pounds this offseason but feels most comfortable around 195.

### EMERGING STAR

#### S MARTEZ MANUEL

As a first-year starter, Manuel played the strong safety/outside linebacker hybrid role in MU's 2020 scheme and emerged as one of the SEC's best young playmakers. … Ranked third on the team with 64 tackles, second in tackles for loss with 6.5, broke up five passes and forced a fumble. … Also posted the secondary's best Pro Football Focus tackling grade (68.0). … His 2.5 sacks ranked third among all Power 5 safeties.

### TOP NEWCOMER

#### WR MOOKIE COOPER

Former four-star prospect from St. Louis entered the transfer portal in December after not seeing the field as a freshman at Ohio State. … Chose Mizzou over Florida, Georgia and Tennessee. … Immediately worked in the slot during spring practices; could become a receiving and rushing threat. … Last played in 2018 at Trinity Catholic High and caught 29 passes for 869 yards and nine TDs and totaled 1,153 yards of total offense for 18 touchdowns.

# 2020 SEC LEADERS

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

| PASS EFFICIENCY | G | CMP | ATT | INT | YDS | TD | EFFIC. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Mac Jones, Alabama | 13 | 402 | 311 | 4 | 4500 | 41 | 203.1 |
| 2. Kyle Trask, Florida | 12 | 437 | 301 | 8 | 4283 | 43 | 180.0 |
| 3. Matt Corral, Ole Miss | 10 | 326 | 231 | 14 | 3337 | 29 | 177.6 |
| 4. Feleipe Franks, Arkansas | 10 | 238 | 163 | 4 | 2107 | 17 | 163.1 |
| 5. Kellen Mond, Texas A&M | 10 | 297 | 188 | 3 | 2282 | 19 | 146.9 |
| 6. Connor Bazelak, Missouri | 10 | 324 | 218 | 6 | 2366 | 7 | 132.1 |
| 7. Stetson Bennett, Georgia | 8 | 155 | 86 | 6 | 1179 | 8 | 128.7 |
| 8. Ken Seals, Vanderbilt | 9 | 288 | 186 | 10 | 1928 | 12 | 127.6 |
| 9. Bo Nix, Auburn | 11 | 357 | 214 | 7 | 2415 | 12 | 123.9 |
| 10. Will Rogers, Mississippi State | 9 | 346 | 239 | 7 | 1976 | 11 | 123.5 |

| INTERCEPTIONS | G | NO. | YDS | TD | AVG/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Emmanuel Forbes, Mississippi State | 11 | 5 | 183 | 3 | 0.45 |
| 2. Eric Stokes, Georgia | 9 | 4 | 94 | 2 | 0.44 |
| Kelvin Joseph, Kentucky | 9 | 4 | 62 | 1 | 0.44 |
| Eli Ricks, LSU | 10 | 4 | 113 | 2 | 0.40 |
| 5. Richard LeCounte, Georgia | 6 | 3 | 38 | 0 | 0.50 |
| Hudson Clark, Arkansas | 8 | 3 | 18 | 0 | 0.38 |
| Jay Ward, LSU | 9 | 3 | 47 | 1 | 0.33 |
| Jamin Davis, Kentucky | 10 | 3 | 90 | 1 | 0.30 |
| Jabril Cox, LSU | 10 | 3 | 64 | 1 | 0.30 |
| Roger McCreary, Auburn | 10 | 3 | 63 | 0 | 0.30 |

| RUSHING | G | ATT | YDS | AVG. | TD | YDS/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Kevin Harris, South Carolina | 10 | 185 | 1138 | 6.15 | 15 | 113.8 |
| 2. Najee Harris, Alabama | 13 | 251 | 1466 | 5.84 | 26 | 112.8 |
| 3. Isaiah Spiller, Texas A&M | 10 | 188 | 1036 | 5.51 | 9 | 103.6 |
| 4. Larry Rountree III, Missouri | 10 | 209 | 972 | 4.65 | 14 | 97.2 |
| 5. Chris Rodriquez Jr., Kentucky | 9 | 119 | 785 | 6.60 | 11 | 87.2 |
| 6. Eric Gray, Tennessee | 9 | 157 | 772 | 4.92 | 4 | 85.8 |
| 7. Tank Bigsby, Auburn | 10 | 138 | 834 | 6.04 | 5 | 83.4 |
| 8. Jerrion Ealy, Ole Miss | 9 | 147 | 745 | 5.07 | 9 | 82.8 |
| 9. Zamir White, Georgia | 10 | 144 | 779 | 5.41 | 11 | 77.9 |
| 10. Trelon Smith, Arkansas | 10 | 134 | 710 | 5.30 | 5 | 71.0 |

| SCORING | G | TD | FG | XPT | 2XP | PTS | PTS/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Najee Harris, Alabama | 13 | 30 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 180 | 13.8 |
| 2. DeVonta Smith, Alabama | 13 | 25 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 150 | 11.5 |
| 3. Will Reichard, Alabama | 13 | 0 | 14 | 84 | 0 | 126 | 9.7 |
| 4. Kevin Harris, South Carolina | 10 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 96 | 9.6 |
| 5. Evan McPherson, Florida | 11 | 0 | 17 | 52 | 0 | 103 | 9.4 |
| 6. Cade York, LSU | 10 | 0 | 18 | 36 | 0 | 90 | 9.0 |
| 7. Larry Rountree III, Missouri | 10 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 84 | 8.4 |
| 8. Harrison Mevis, Missouri | 10 | 0 | 17 | 28 | 0 | 79 | 7.9 |
| 9. Jack Podlesny, Georgia | 10 | 0 | 13 | 38 | 0 | 77 | 7.7 |
| 10. Anders Carlson, Auburn | 11 | 0 | 20 | 24 | 0 | 84 | 7.6 |

| TOTAL OFFENSE | G | RUSH | PASS | PLAYS | TOT | YDS/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Matt Corral, Ole Miss | 10 | 506 | 3337 | 438 | 3843 | 384.3 |
| 2. Kyle Trask, Florida | 12 | 50 | 4283 | 501 | 4333 | 361.1 |
| 3. Mac Jones, Alabama | 13 | 14 | 4500 | 437 | 4514 | 347.2 |
| 4. Kellen Mond, Texas A&M | 10 | 294 | 2282 | 371 | 2576 | 257.6 |
| 5. Bo Nix, Auburn | 11 | 388 | 2415 | 465 | 2803 | 254.8 |
| 6. Connor Bazelak, Missouri | 10 | 20 | 2366 | 368 | 2386 | 238.6 |
| 7. Feleipe Franks, Arkansas | 10 | 204 | 2107 | 343 | 2311 | 231.1 |
| 8. Will Rogers, Mississippi State | 9 | -41 | 1976 | 376 | 1935 | 215.0 |
| 9. Ken Seals, Vanderbilt | 9 | -52 | 1928 | 329 | 1876 | 208.4 |
| 10. Collin Hill, South Carolina | 8 | -66 | 1411 | 258 | 1345 | 168.1 |

| PUNTING | G | NO. | YDS | AVG. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Jake Camarda, Georgia | 10 | 36 | 1677 | 46.58 |
| 2. Max Duffy, Kentucky | 9 | 42 | 1895 | 45.12 |
| 3. Zach Von Rosenberg, LSU | 9 | 59 | 2593 | 43.95 |
| 4. Paxton Brooks, Tennessee | 10 | 49 | 2138 | 43.63 |
| 5. Reid Bauer, Arkansas | 9 | 39 | 1698 | 43.54 |
| 6. Kai Kroeger, South Carolina | 10 | 39 | 1690 | 43.33 |
| 7. Grant McKinniss, Missouri | 10 | 39 | 1680 | 43.08 |
| 8. Harrison Smith, Vanderbilt | 8 | 46 | 1887 | 41.02 |
| 9. Nik Constantinou, Texas A&M | 10 | 36 | 1459 | 40.53 |

| RECEIVING YDS/GAME | G | REC. | YDS | TD | YDS/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Elijah Moore, Ole Miss | 8 | 86 | 1193 | 8 | 149.1 |
| 2. DeVonta Smith, Alabama | 13 | 117 | 1856 | 23 | 142.8 |
| 3. Treylon Burks, Arkansas | 9 | 51 | 820 | 7 | 91.1 |
| 4. Kadarius Toney, Florida | 11 | 70 | 984 | 10 | 89.5 |
| 5. Kayshon Boutte, LSU | 10 | 45 | 735 | 5 | 73.5 |
| 6. John Metchie III, Alabama | 13 | 55 | 916 | 6 | 70.5 |
| 7. Shi Smith, South Carolina | 9 | 57 | 633 | 4 | 70.3 |
| 8. Seth Williams, Auburn | 11 | 47 | 760 | 4 | 69.1 |
| 9. Kenny Yeboah, Ole Miss | 8 | 27 | 524 | 6 | 65.5 |
| 10. Jaden Walley, Mississippi State | 11 | 52 | 718 | 2 | 65.3 |

TEAM STATISTICS

| TOTAL OFFENSE | G | RUSH | PASS | PLAY | TOT | YDS/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Ole Miss | 10 | 2106 | 3449 | 797 | 5555 | 555.5 |
| 2. Alabama | 13 | 2385 | 4656 | 902 | 7041 | 541.6 |
| 3. Florida | 12 | 1575 | 4543 | 840 | 6118 | 509.8 |
| 4. Texas A&M | 10 | 2051 | 2341 | 678 | 4392 | 439.2 |
| 5. LSU | 10 | 1217 | 3122 | 786 | 4339 | 433.9 |
| 6. Georgia | 10 | 1742 | 2499 | 683 | 4241 | 424.1 |
| 7. Missouri | 10 | 1352 | 2668 | 714 | 4020 | 402.0 |
| 8. Arkansas | 10 | 1513 | 2402 | 678 | 3915 | 391.5 |
| 9. Auburn | 11 | 1788 | 2423 | 754 | 4211 | 382.8 |
| 10. South Carolina | 10 | 1679 | 1872 | 664 | 3551 | 355.1 |
| 11. Tennessee | 10 | 1415 | 2047 | 660 | 3462 | 346.2 |
| 12. Mississippi State | 11 | 483 | 3259 | 761 | 3742 | 340.2 |
| 13. Vanderbilt | 9 | 991 | 1979 | 630 | 2970 | 330.0 |
| 14. Kentucky | 11 | 2162 | 1336 | 679 | 3498 | 318.0 |

| TOTAL DEFENSE | G | RUSH | PASS | PLAY | TOT | YDS/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Texas A&M | 10 | 920 | 2253 | 593 | 3173 | 317.3 |
| 2. Georgia | 10 | 723 | 2487 | 661 | 3210 | 321.0 |
| 3. Alabama | 13 | 1470 | 3109 | 909 | 4579 | 352.2 |
| 4. Kentucky | 11 | 1717 | 2471 | 764 | 4188 | 380.7 |
| 5. Mississippi State | 11 | 1390 | 2897 | 780 | 4287 | 389.7 |
| 6. Auburn | 11 | 1797 | 2669 | 794 | 4466 | 406.0 |
| 7. Tennessee | 10 | 1416 | 2658 | 699 | 4074 | 407.4 |
| 8. Missouri | 10 | 1622 | 2458 | 669 | 4080 | 408.0 |
| 9. Florida | 12 | 2046 | 3090 | 847 | 5136 | 428.0 |
| 10. South Carolina | 10 | 1954 | 2561 | 688 | 4515 | 451.5 |
| 11. Arkansas | 10 | 1921 | 2596 | 799 | 4517 | 451.7 |
| 12. Vanderbilt | 9 | 1719 | 2668 | 603 | 4387 | 487.4 |
| 13. LSU | 10 | 1690 | 3230 | 678 | 4920 | 492.0 |
| 14. Ole Miss | 10 | 2069 | 3121 | 778 | 5190 | 519.0 |

| KICKOFF RETURNS | G | NO | YDS | TD | AVG. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Georgia | 10 | 20 | 594 | 0 | 29.70 |
| 2. Mississippi State | 11 | 14 | 393 | 0 | 28.07 |
| 3. Ole Miss | 10 | 21 | 503 | 1 | 23.95 |
| 4. LSU | 10 | 15 | 346 | 1 | 23.07 |
| 5. Vanderbilt | 9 | 15 | 336 | 0 | 22.40 |
| 6. Auburn | 11 | 23 | 505 | 0 | 21.96 |
| 7. Tennessee | 10 | 19 | 394 | 0 | 20.74 |
| 8. South Carolina | 10 | 13 | 256 | 0 | 19.69 |
| 9. Florida | 12 | 14 | 272 | 0 | 19.43 |
| 10. Kentucky | 11 | 16 | 298 | 0 | 18.63 |
| 11. Arkansas | 10 | 9 | 157 | 0 | 17.44 |
| 12. Missouri | 10 | 10 | 163 | 0 | 16.30 |
| 13. Alabama | 13 | 18 | 276 | 0 | 15.33 |
| 14. Texas A&M | 10 | 3 | 30 | 0 | 10.00 |

| SCORING OFFENSE | G | TD | FG | XPT | 2XP | SAF | PTS | AVG |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Alabama | 13 | 84 | 14 | 84 | 0 | 0 | 630 | 48.5 |
| 2. Florida | 12 | 60 | 19 | 59 | 1 | 0 | 478 | 39.8 |
| 3. Ole Miss | 10 | 54 | 6 | 46 | 2 | 0 | 392 | 39.2 |
| 4. Texas A&M | 10 | 42 | 11 | 41 | 0 | 0 | 326 | 32.6 |
| 5. Georgia | 10 | 40 | 13 | 38 | 1 | 2 | 323 | 32.3 |
| 6. LSU | 10 | 38 | 18 | 36 | 1 | 0 | 320 | 32.0 |
| 7. Missouri | 10 | 31 | 17 | 28 | 1 | 0 | 267 | 26.7 |
| 8. Arkansas | 10 | 34 | 8 | 27 | 1 | 0 | 257 | 25.7 |
| 9. Auburn | 11 | 31 | 20 | 24 | 3 | 0 | 276 | 25.1 |
| 10. South Carolina | 10 | 29 | 11 | 26 | 1 | 0 | 235 | 23.5 |
| 11. Kentucky | 11 | 29 | 13 | 27 | 0 | 0 | 240 | 21.8 |
| 12. Tennessee | 10 | 29 | 5 | 26 | 0 | 0 | 215 | 21.5 |
| 13. Mississippi State | 11 | 29 | 10 | 29 | 0 | 1 | 235 | 21.4 |
| 14. Vanderbilt | 9 | 17 | 4 | 17 | 0 | 1 | 133 | 14.8 |

| SCORING DEFENSE | G | TD | FG | XPT | 2XP | SAF | PTS | AVG |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Alabama | 13 | 30 | 14 | 28 | 1 | 0 | 252 | 19.4 |
| 2. Georgia | 10 | 24 | 11 | 23 | 0 | 0 | 200 | 20.0 |
| 3. Texas A&M | 10 | 27 | 9 | 26 | 0 | 1 | 217 | 21.7 |
| 4. Auburn | 11 | 36 | 8 | 30 | 1 | 0 | 272 | 24.7 |
| 5. Kentucky | 11 | 38 | 5 | 36 | 2 | 1 | 285 | 25.9 |
| 6. Mississippi State | 11 | 38 | 14 | 35 | 2 | 0 | 309 | 28.1 |
| 7. Tennessee | 10 | 35 | 19 | 34 | 0 | 0 | 301 | 30.1 |
| 8. Florida | 12 | 48 | 12 | 44 | 1 | 0 | 370 | 30.8 |
| 9. Missouri | 10 | 42 | 10 | 39 | 1 | 0 | 323 | 32.3 |
| 10. Arkansas | 10 | 43 | 15 | 42 | 1 | 1 | 349 | 34.9 |
| LSU | 10 | 45 | 12 | 43 | 0 | 0 | 349 | 34.9 |
| 12. South Carolina | 10 | 47 | 11 | 45 | 0 | 0 | 360 | 36.0 |
| 13. Vanderbilt | 9 | 44 | 10 | 40 | 1 | 0 | 336 | 37.3 |
| 14. Ole Miss | 10 | 50 | 12 | 45 | 1 | 0 | 383 | 38.3 |

| PUNT RETURN AVG | G | NO | YDS | TD | AVG. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Alabama | 13 | 20 | 299 | 1 | 14.9 |
| 2. Florida | 12 | 11 | 139 | 1 | 12.6 |
| 3. Kentucky | 11 | 6 | 62 | 0 | 10.3 |
| 4. LSU | 10 | 13 | 122 | 0 | 9.4 |
| 5. Vanderbilt | 9 | 5 | 46 | 0 | 9.2 |
| 6. Auburn | 11 | 9 | 82 | 1 | 9.1 |
| 7. Georgia | 10 | 17 | 124 | 0 | 7.1 |
| 8. Ole Miss | 10 | 7 | 49 | 0 | 7.0 |
| Tennessee | 10 | 5 | 35 | 0 | 7.0 |
| 10. Mississippi State | 11 | 10 | 69 | 0 | 6.9 |
| 11. Texas A&M | 10 | 16 | 96 | 0 | 6.0 |
| 12. Arkansas | 10 | 4 | 18 | 0 | 4.5 |
| 13. Missouri | 10 | 11 | 45 | 0 | 4.1 |
| 14. South Carolina | 10 | 8 | 29 | 0 | 3.6 |

| RUSHING OFFENSE | G | ATT | YDS | AVG. | TD | YDS/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Ole Miss | 10 | 462 | 2106 | 4.56 | 23 | 210.60 |
| 2. Texas A&M | 10 | 376 | 2051 | 5.45 | 21 | 205.10 |
| 3. Kentucky | 11 | 436 | 2162 | 4.96 | 19 | 196.55 |
| 4. Alabama | 13 | 477 | 2385 | 5.00 | 37 | 183.46 |
| 5. Georgia | 10 | 377 | 1742 | 4.62 | 18 | 174.20 |
| 6. South Carolina | 10 | 369 | 1679 | 4.55 | 21 | 167.90 |
| 7. Auburn | 11 | 392 | 1788 | 4.56 | 16 | 162.55 |
| 8. Arkansas | 10 | 394 | 1513 | 3.84 | 11 | 151.30 |
| 9. Tennessee | 10 | 375 | 1415 | 3.77 | 12 | 141.50 |
| 10. Missouri | 10 | 351 | 1352 | 3.85 | 21 | 135.20 |
| 11. Florida | 12 | 367 | 1575 | 4.29 | 12 | 131.25 |
| 12. LSU | 10 | 365 | 1217 | 3.33 | 9 | 121.70 |
| 13. Vanderbilt | 9 | 329 | 991 | 3.01 | 4 | 110.11 |
| 14. Mississippi State | 11 | 204 | 483 | 2.37 | 8 | 43.91 |

| RUSHING DEFENSE | G | ATT | YARDS | AVG. | TD | YDS/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Georgia | 10 | 302 | 723 | 2.39 | 8 | 72.30 |
| 2. Texas A&M | 10 | 283 | 920 | 3.25 | 6 | 92.00 |
| 3. Alabama | 13 | 441 | 1470 | 3.33 | 15 | 113.08 |
| 4. Mississippi State | 11 | 391 | 1390 | 3.55 | 11 | 126.36 |
| 5. Tennessee | 10 | 385 | 1416 | 3.68 | 15 | 141.60 |
| 6. Kentucky | 11 | 408 | 1717 | 4.21 | 18 | 156.09 |
| 7. Missouri | 10 | 358 | 1622 | 4.53 | 19 | 162.20 |
| 8. Auburn | 11 | 430 | 1797 | 4.18 | 16 | 163.36 |
| 9. LSU | 10 | 346 | 1690 | 4.88 | 18 | 169.00 |
| 10. Florida | 12 | 449 | 2046 | 4.56 | 16 | 170.50 |
| 11. Vanderbilt | 9 | 302 | 1719 | 5.69 | 19 | 191.00 |
| 12. Arkansas | 10 | 416 | 1921 | 4.62 | 21 | 192.10 |
| 13. South Carolina | 10 | 398 | 1954 | 4.91 | 23 | 195.40 |
| 14. Ole Miss | 10 | 391 | 2069 | 5.29 | 28 | 206.90 |

| PUNTING | G | NO | YDS | AVG | YDS/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Ole Miss | 10 | 27 | 1259 | 46.63 | 125.9 |
| 2. Florida | 12 | 29 | 1333 | 45.97 | 111.1 |
| 3. Kentucky | 11 | 52 | 2372 | 45.62 | 215.6 |
| 4. Georgia | 10 | 37 | 1677 | 45.32 | 167.7 |
| 5. LSU | 10 | 59 | 2593 | 43.95 | 259.3 |
| 6. Tennessee | 10 | 49 | 2138 | 43.63 | 213.8 |
| 7. South Carolina | 10 | 39 | 1690 | 43.33 | 169.0 |
| 8. Missouri | 10 | 39 | 1680 | 43.08 | 168.0 |
| 9. Arkansas | 10 | 62 | 2610 | 42.10 | 261.0 |
| 10. Mississippi State | 11 | 60 | 2504 | 41.73 | 227.6 |
| 11. Auburn | 11 | 47 | 1921 | 40.87 | 174.6 |
| 12. Texas A&M | 10 | 36 | 1459 | 40.53 | 145.9 |
| 13. Vanderbilt | 9 | 51 | 2053 | 40.25 | 228.1 |
| 14. Alabama | 13 | 32 | 1216 | 38.00 | 93.5 |

| PASS OFFENSE | G | ATT | COMP | PCT | YDS | AVG | TD | INT | YDS/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Florida | 12 | 473 | 321 | 67.9 | 4543 | 9.6 | 46 | 10 | 378.6 |
| 2. Alabama | 13 | 425 | 324 | 76.2 | 4656 | 11.0 | 42 | 4 | 358.2 |
| 3. Ole Miss | 10 | 335 | 238 | 71.0 | 3449 | 10.3 | 30 | 14 | 344.9 |
| 4. LSU | 10 | 421 | 247 | 58.7 | 3122 | 7.4 | 24 | 9 | 312.2 |
| 5. Mississippi State | 11 | 557 | 373 | 67.0 | 3259 | 5.9 | 17 | 18 | 296.3 |
| 6. Missouri | 10 | 363 | 246 | 67.8 | 2668 | 7.3 | 9 | 6 | 266.8 |
| 7. Georgia | 10 | 306 | 178 | 58.2 | 2499 | 8.2 | 19 | 11 | 249.9 |
| 8. Arkansas | 10 | 284 | 183 | 64.4 | 2402 | 8.5 | 20 | 6 | 240.2 |
| 9. Texas A&M | 10 | 302 | 190 | 62.9 | 2341 | 7.8 | 20 | 4 | 234.1 |
| 10. Auburn | 11 | 362 | 216 | 59.7 | 2423 | 6.7 | 12 | 7 | 220.3 |
| 11. Vanderbilt | 9 | 301 | 192 | 63.8 | 1979 | 6.6 | 13 | 11 | 219.9 |
| 12. Tennessee | 10 | 285 | 179 | 62.8 | 2047 | 7.2 | 14 | 9 | 204.7 |
| 13. South Carolina | 10 | 295 | 175 | 59.3 | 1872 | 6.3 | 8 | 9 | 187.2 |
| 14. Kentucky | 11 | 243 | 145 | 59.7 | 1336 | 5.5 | 7 | 5 | 121.5 |

| PASS DEFENSE | G | ATT | COMP | PCT | YDS | AVG | TD | INT | YDS/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Kentucky | 11 | 356 | 235 | 66.0 | 2471 | 6.9 | 18 | 16 | 224.6 |
| 2. Texas A&M | 10 | 310 | 196 | 63.2 | 2253 | 7.3 | 19 | 10 | 225.3 |
| 3. Alabama | 13 | 468 | 272 | 58.1 | 3109 | 6.6 | 15 | 12 | 239.2 |
| 4. Auburn | 11 | 364 | 235 | 64.6 | 2669 | 7.3 | 20 | 9 | 242.6 |
| 5. Missouri | 10 | 311 | 182 | 58.5 | 2458 | 7.9 | 21 | 4 | 245.8 |
| 6. Georgia | 10 | 359 | 236 | 65.7 | 2487 | 6.9 | 15 | 9 | 248.7 |
| 7. South Carolina | 10 | 290 | 193 | 66.6 | 2561 | 8.8 | 21 | 8 | 256.1 |
| 8. Florida | 12 | 398 | 255 | 64.1 | 3090 | 7.8 | 28 | 9 | 257.5 |
| 9. Arkansas | 10 | 383 | 254 | 66.3 | 2596 | 6.8 | 18 | 13 | 259.6 |
| 10. Mississippi State | 11 | 389 | 240 | 61.7 | 2897 | 7.4 | 23 | 11 | 263.4 |
| 11. Tennessee | 10 | 314 | 214 | 68.2 | 2658 | 8.5 | 15 | 5 | 265.8 |
| 12. Vanderbilt | 9 | 301 | 221 | 73.4 | 2668 | 8.9 | 24 | 2 | 296.4 |
| 13. Ole Miss | 10 | 387 | 263 | 68.0 | 3121 | 8.1 | 19 | 6 | 312.1 |
| 14. LSU | 10 | 332 | 198 | 59.6 | 3230 | 9.7 | 24 | 13 | 323.0 |

| TURNOVER MARGIN | G | +FUM | +INT | TOT | FUM | -INT | -TOT | MAR |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Kentucky | 11 | 6 | 16 | 22 | 7 | 5 | 12 | 10 |
| Alabama | 13 | 10 | 12 | 22 | 8 | 4 | 12 | 10 |
| 3. LSU | 10 | 9 | 13 | 22 | 4 | 9 | 13 | 9 |
| 4. Texas A&M | 10 | 4 | 10 | 14 | 4 | 4 | 8 | 6 |
| 5. Arkansas | 10 | 5 | 13 | 18 | 7 | 6 | 13 | 5 |
| 6. Auburn | 11 | 4 | 9 | 13 | 2 | 7 | 9 | 4 |
| 7. Georgia | 10 | 4 | 9 | 13 | 4 | 11 | 15 | -2 |
| 8. Florida | 12 | 7 | 9 | 16 | 9 | 10 | 19 | -3 |
| 9. South Carolina | 10 | 3 | 8 | 11 | 6 | 9 | 15 | -4 |
| 10. Ole Miss | 10 | 7 | 6 | 13 | 4 | 14 | 18 | -5 |
| 10. Tennessee | 10 | 5 | 5 | 10 | 6 | 9 | 15 | -5 |
| 10. Missouri | 10 | 5 | 4 | 9 | 8 | 6 | 14 | -5 |
| 13. Mississippi State | 11 | 7 | 11 | 18 | 7 | 18 | 25 | -7 |
| 14. Vanderbilt | 9 | 7 | 2 | 9 | 6 | 11 | 17 | -8 |

# SOUTH CAROLINA GAMECOCKS

For more coverage of the Gamecocks, visit southcarolina.247Sports.com

**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Marcus Satterfield **DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Clayton White **STADIUM:** Williams-Brice Stadium: 80,250

## BEAMER BALL ARRIVES IN COLUMBIA WITH HOPE AND MYSTERY

There are a lot of unknowns when it comes to South Carolina.

Shane Beamer is a first-time head coach. Coordinators Marcus Satterfield and Clayton White have never called a play in Power 5 football. Practices were closed and the spring game was short, preserving the air of mystery surrounding the Gamecocks entering the 2021 season.

And that might just be a good thing.

Beamer, a former assistant who helped build some of the best teams in school history during his time from 2007-10, replaces Will Muschamp, who brought in a staff full of big names and SEC accolades but had little success in his five-year tenure. Only one coach remains from Muschamp's staff, and Beamer has only four coaches with SEC experience.

"I want guys that want to be here," Beamer said. "I'm not just going out to hire (someone) that has a fancy name or because he's coached in the SEC for 20 years. There are plenty of examples of that where it hasn't worked out a lot here recently."

Satterfield was an offensive coordinator under Matt Rhule at Temple, then became head coach at Tennessee Tech before linking back up with Rhule at Baylor and following him to the Carolina Panthers. Beamer and Satterfield grew tight when they were graduate assistants at Tennessee in 2002-03, and Rhule gave a strong recommendation for Satterfield when the position opened.

Beamer is going to have a strong influence putting together the offense, modeling it after what he did under Lincoln Riley at Oklahoma, while Satterfield draws from his experience under Joe Brady.

"It's a bunch of guys that have something to prove," Satterfield said of the coaching staff. "It's not some retreads that got fired from an NFL team or an offensive coordinator at the tail end of his career."

White spent four seasons at Western Kentucky, his first stop as a defensive coordinator before Beamer made the call to hire the three-time Broyles Award nominee. He put a top 30 defense in the country on the field in each of his final three seasons with the Hilltoppers and had a group that allowed only 20.1 points per game in 2020.

"I think we have a great coaching staff right now in that building and I do feel great about things as we're starting," White said.

South Carolina doesn't have a bunch of "retreads" on this coaching staff, and that provides a rousing element of uncertainty to the Gamecocks entering the 2021 season.

### OFFENSE

Marcus Satterfield has talent at nearly every position, and the expectation is for this offense to be a run-heavy outfit.

The Gamecocks return one of the top tailbacks in the country, Kevin Harris, who rushed for 1,138 yards in only 10 games. South Carolina will couple him with former top 50 national recruit MarShawn Lloyd and ZaQuandre White, who was the spring game star, but needs to put fumbling issues from previous seasons behind him.

"We have guys that we can hand the ball off to 35 times per game," Satterfield said. "We have guys that we can throw the ball out of the backfield to and use as receiver types as well."

Quarterback Luke Doty, a former top 100 recruit in the 247Sports Composite, started the final two games a season ago but had limited success. His talent and athleticism are immense, and he routinely posts some of the top GPS-registered speeds on the practice field.

He's still developing as a passer, but Doty is a proven winner, having guided his team to a championship as a junior in high school and was on his way to another before suffering an injury during his senior year.

There are big question marks at receiver after the team lost Shi Smith (sixth-round pick), and there are no returning players at the position who caught more than 11 passes. A pair of transfers — Ahmarean Brown from Georgia Tech and E.J. Jenkins from St. Francis (Pa.) — will provide immediate help, while returning players Jalen Brooks and Dakereon Joyner each had

## SCHEDULE

| Date | Opponent | '20 Record |
|---|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | EASTERN ILLINOIS | 1-5 |
| Sept. 11 | at East Carolina | 3-6 |
| Sept. 18 | at Georgia | 8-2 |
| Sept. 25 | KENTUCKY | 5-6 |
| Oct. 2 | TROY | 5-6 |
| Oct. 9 | at Tennessee | 3-7 |
| Oct. 16 | VANDERBILT | 0-9 |
| Oct. 23 | at Texas A&M | 9-1 |
| Nov. 6 | FLORIDA | 8-4 |
| Nov. 13 | at Missouri | 5-5 |
| Nov. 20 | AUBURN | 6-5 |
| Nov. 27 | CLEMSON | 10-2 |

## RESULTS

| 2-8, 2-8 | | |
|---|---|---|
| L | TENNESSEE | 27-31 |
| L | at Florida | 24-38 |
| W | at Vanderbilt | 41-7 |
| W | AUBURN | 30-22 |
| L | at LSU | 24-52 |
| L | TEXAS A&M | 3-48 |
| L | at Ole Miss | 42-59 |
| L | MISSOURI | 10-17 |
| L | GEORGIA | 16-45 |
| L | at Kentucky | 18-41 |

## 10-YEAR WINNING TREND

## AT A GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Columbia, S.C.

**2020:** 2-8 overall, 2-8 SEC (6th, East)

**COACH:** Shane Beamer — At South Carolina and overall: 1st year

**RETURNING STARTERS:** 14; 7 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:**
QB Luke Doty, RB Kevin Harris, TE Nick Muse, OL Dylan Wonnum, DL Kingsley Enagbare, DL Zacch Pickens, CB Cam Smith

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:**
The Gamecocks should be productive on the ground with Harris, who averaged more yards rushing per game than any player in the SEC, and MarShawn Lloyd, a ballyhooed recruit who was injured last season. Doty is also productive with his legs. Enagbare anchors a group of talented defensive linemen.

**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:**
A two-win team will have a lot of weaknesses, but the biggest problems are at wide receiver and defensive back. The Gamecocks have wideouts in numbers, but no player at that position had more than 11 catches last year. The secondary was decimated by departures, including first-rounder Jaycee Horn.

**KEY LOSSES:**
WR Shi Smith, OG Sadarius Hutcherson, LB Ernest Jones, DB Jaycee Horn, DB Jammie Robinson

**OVERVIEW:**
A coaching change was required after South Carolina had one of its worst seasons in school history, and Beamer takes over a program with a lot of challenges to overcome. There are some individually talented players but an almost entirely new coaching staff has little SEC experience, raising questions about what the Gamecocks will look like in 2021.

**KEY NUMBER:**
**0** The number of plays that have been called at the Power 5 level by South Carolina's offensive and defensive coordinators combined.

RB
Kevin
HARRIS

Photo by Joe Robbins

DE
**Kingsley Enagbare**
Photo by Michael Wade

## SCOUTING REPORT: Offense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | Luke Doty | So. | Dual-threat still growing as a passer in first full year as starter. | Jason Brown, Sr. |
| **RB** | **Kevin Harris*** | Jr. | Quickly ascended to become one of the country's top rushers. | MarShawn Lloyd, Fr. |
| WR | Jalen Brooks | Sr. | Transfer with big-play ability looked comfortable at end of 2020. | **Xavier Legette, Jr.*** |
| WR | Dakereon Joyner | Jr. | Converted quarterback who earned three spring awards. | Ahmarean Brown, Jr. |
| TE | E.J. Jenkins | Sr. | Part wide receiver, part tight end, 100 percent playmaker. | Jaheim Bell, So. |
| **TE** | **Nick Muse*** | Sr. | Most productive returning pass-catcher and a new favorite target. | Keveon Mullins, So. |
| LT | Jazston Turnetine | Sr. | Will battle Jakai Moore, who was out all spring with injury. | **Jakai Moore, So.*** |
| LG | Jaylen Nichols | Jr. | Versatile player who has four career starts at right tackle. | Vershon Lee, So. |
| **C** | **Eric Douglas*** | Sr. | Has time at each position on the OL but found a home at center. | Hank Manos, Jr. |
| **RG** | **Jovaughn Gwyn*** | Jr. | Maybe the most powerful player on the team. | Jordan Rhodes, Sr. |
| **RT** | **Dylan Wonnum*** | Sr. | Four-year starter and brother of Vikings defender D.J. Wonnum. | Jaylen Nichols, Jr. |
| **PK** | **Parker White*** | Sr. | Needs 70 points to become school's all-time leading scorer. | Mitch Jeter, So. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

## SCOUTING REPORT: Defense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **DE** | **Kingsley Enagbare*** | Sr. | First-team All-SEC; ranked second in sacks per game. | Aaron Sterling, Sr. |
| **DT** | **Zacch Pickens*** | Jr. | Former five-star recruit looking for a breakout season. | Rick Sandidge, Sr. |
| **DT** | **Jabari Ellis*** | Sr. | Unheralded team leader; made 27 tackles in eight starts in 2020. | Tonka Hemingway, So. |
| DE | Jordan Burch | So. | Second-highest ranked recruit to sign at USC (Jadeveon Clowney). | Jordan Strachan, Sr. |
| LB | Brad Johnson | Sr. | Injury-plagued career looking for consistency at a new position. | Mohamed Kaba, So. |
| LB | Sherrod Greene | Sr. | Missed 2020 with a fractured hip; should reclaim starting spot. | **Damani Staley, Sr.*** |
| NB | David Spaulding | So. | Georgia Southern transfer has inside track at starting nickel. | Debo Williams, Fr. |
| CB | Cam Smith | So. | Forced into starting role at end of last year; improved each game. | Carlins Platel, Sr. |
| CB | Dominick Hill | So. | The corner position opposite Smith is wide open. | Marcellas Dial, So. |
| **SS** | **R.J. Roderick*** | Sr. | Only returning starter in a secondary decimated by departures. | O'Donnell Fortune, Fr. |
| FS | Jaylin Dickerson | Jr. | Injury-plagued career but a starter when healthy. | Jaylan Foster, Sr. |
| **P** | **Kai Kroeger*** | So. | Averaged 45.2 yards per punt in his final 29 attempts. | Mitch Jeter, So. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

standout moments in spring practice.

Jenkins will double as a tight end, where he is joined by Nick Muse, who caught 30 passes a year ago and has emerged as one of Doty's favorite targets. Another playmaker to keep an eye on is Jaheim Bell, who plays some tight end, H-back and even got some carries at running back in the spring.

"You'll see them lined up all over," Beamer said of Bell, Jenkins and Muse. "That's what we want to have in this offense, the flexibility to move guys around."

The offensive line has the potential to be a strength with four starters returning, but it was a group that allowed the most tackles for loss of any team in the SEC by a wide margin. To say the group underperformed last season seems fair, but it also helped produce South Carolina's first 1,000-yard tailback since the 2013 season.

South Carolina has some talent and experience at each position on offense, but exactly how it comes together under Satterfield, an offensive coordinator for the first time since 2015, remains intriguing.

## DEFENSE

Each level of the defense is vastly different this season.

The Gamecocks return a healthy dose of talent and experience along the front four of the 4-2-5 defense that new coordinator Clayton White has installed in his first season with the program. At linebacker, there's a nice blend of youth and old hands, while the secondary is almost completely turned over.

While White is new to the Gamecocks, his base defense is not — although it's been a while. The scheme was used under former defensive coordinator Ellis Johnson from 2008-11, which saw the program go to four bowl games, win an SEC East title and ascend to as high as ninth in the polls.

"It's a multiple, aggressive scheme that allows our players to play fast; it allows our defensive line to attack up front," White said. "It allows our linebackers to be downhill and read keys and they have an opportunity to play fast. Our DBs are going to be up close on coverage."

Kingsley Enagbare, a first-team All-SEC selection last year, ranked second in the league in sacks and forced fumbles per game last year, and will team with former five-star recruit Jordan Burch on the edges. Jabari Ellis and Zacch Pickens, along with Tonka Hemingway and Aaron Sterling, bring their versatile playmaking ability to either the end or tackle position.

"I love this new defense. It's very aggressive," Enagbare said.

"The aggression isn't coming from just blitzing, but the way we attack every-

## TOP 5 NFL PROSPECTS

**1. Kingsley Enagbare DE 6-4 260 4.78 Sr.**

South Carolina has churned out first-round picks at an increasing rate in recent years, and Enagbare should be the next Gamecocks pass rusher to go on Day 1. He possesses explosive burst off the line and is effective utilizing his hands to create an advantage, while keeping his pad level low as he goes to the pocket. He flashed an effective speed rush off the edge last season, in addition to a powerful bull rush. Enagbare can play violently, while mixing in some elegance at times.

In 2020, his first season as a starter, Enagbare had 30 tackles, adding six sacks and three forced fumbles as he earned first-team All-SEC honors from the league coaches and a second-team all-conference nod from the Associated Press. His current hybrid role as a pass-rushing linebacker translates well to the NFL in either a 3-4 or a 4-3 base defense.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2. Nick Muse** | **TE** | **6-4** | **249** | **4.78** | **Sr.** |
| **3. Kevin Harris** | **RB** | **5-10** | **225** | **4.58** | **Jr.** |
| **4. Dylan Wonnum** | **OT** | **6-5** | **305** | **5.27** | **Sr.** |
| **5. Jordan Strachan** | **OLB** | **6-4** | **220** | **4.75** | **Sr.** |

— Ric Serritella, NFL Draft Bible

thing. Just going hard, going at things. This new defense is letting the D-line rush and get one-on-one opportunities, which should mean more sacks and production from all of us."

There's a lot to love about the line of scrimmage on the defensive side of the football, but the Gamecocks need to improve tremendously on the back seven of the defense.

Four linebackers have at least four years in the program, but the talent is in the youth. Mohamed Kaba and Debo Williams will push veterans Sherrod Greene, Brad Johnson and Damani Staley. The greenhorns stand a chance of supplanting the veterans in time.

Four critical players in the secondary left either for the NFL or the transfer portal, including No. 8 overall NFL draft pick Jaycee Horn. Only safety R.J. Roderick returns, and he's been an inconsistent player for the better part of his career. Cornerback Cam Smith grew tremendously late in 2020 after three players opted out and two more were injured.

"That is a thin group, but credit those guys," Beamer said. "The guys stepped up and have done a nice job. We have to continue to add to the depth in that room."

The Gamecocks will have to rely on a pair of junior college players and two more from the transfer portal to help a secondary that returns only two players with meaningful defensive snaps.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

The kicking game should be a strength for the Gamecocks this season as four-year returning starter Parker White returns looking to break the school record for points scored in a career, sitting just 70 points from surpassing Elliott Fry's mark of 359.

Freshman All-SEC selection Kai Kroeger and his left foot averaged 43.3 yards per punt and is unchallenged for that position.

New coordinator Pete Lembo has a challenge ahead of him with regard to coverage and return units, which all ranked in the bottom half of the SEC a season ago. A lack of depth on defense in the back seven hurts special teams, and the Gamecocks will also need to replace Shi Smith, who was a playmaker in the return game.

DB

**Cam Smith**

Photo by Michael Wade

## SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

An early-season trip to face Georgia is going to be a real challenge, but six of the first seven games on the docket could produce victories and confidence for a team that played the bulk of 2020 without any.

Three of the final four games are at Williams-Brice Stadium, where full capacity is expected this season, with the season finale against Clemson, a team that has a six-game winning streak over the Gamecocks.

— John Whittle

### 2018 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 30.1 | 56 |
| Rushing | 152.8 | 91 |
| Passing | 272.8 | 26 |
| Total | 425.6 | 43 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 27.2 | 69 |
| Rushing | 195.3 | 95 |
| Passing | 229.0 | 65 |
| Total | 424.3 | 84 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| -5 | -0.38 | T-100 |

### 2019 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 22.4 | 104 |
| Rushing | 149.7 | 82 |
| Passing | 222.3 | 74 |
| Total | 371.9 | 96 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 26.1 | 53 |
| Rushing | 158.0 | 66 |
| Passing | 235.3 | 80 |
| Total | 393.3 | 66 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 3 | + 0.25 | T-43 |

### 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 23.5 | 98 |
| Rushing | 167.9 | 60 |
| Passing | 187.2 | 104 |
| Total | 355.1 | 96 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 36.0 | T-105 |
| Rushing | 195.4 | 95 |
| Passing | 256.1 | 97 |
| Total | 451.5 | 105 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 4 | - 0.40 | 93 |

# NOTEBOOK

South Carolina has last year's national leader in sacks on its roster in 2021, but he planted the quarterback in the turf 10.5 times while wearing a Georgia State uniform. **Jordan Strachan** left the Panthers, coached by former South Carolina assistant and interim head coach **Shawn Elliott**, for the Gamecocks for his final year of eligibility.

"I wanted to challenge myself," Strachan said. "Me and my family wanted a challenge and to see what I could do at this stage and this level of football. I felt like I did everything I could do at the level I was and the school I was at, and I wanted to play big-time football."

A former walk-on with the Georgia State program, Strachan had three forced fumbles in 2020 and also totaled a school record 14 tackles for loss.

• One of the Gamecocks' biggest weakness in recent seasons has been the wide receiver spot — especially the lack of speed at the position. One player added through the transfer portal who should help is former Georgia Tech standout **Ahmarean Brown**, who should be featured in the slot.

Brown started 17 games over his first two seasons with the Yellow Jackets and tied NFL great **Calvin Johnson**'s freshman record for receiving touchdowns with seven. In his two years, he averaged 18.1 yards per reception and was a big-play threat for the ACC school.

• A pair of second-year players to keep an eye on are **Jaheim Bell** and **O'Donnell Fortune**, who both made a tremendous impression late in the spring. Bell is a Swiss Army knife type of player who lined up at wide receiver, tight end, running back and H-back at times in the spring.

"I'm just an athlete, so whatever my coach tells me to do, I do it at 100 percent," Bell said.

Fortune emerged late in the spring in a secondary desperate for playmakers. He saw action at corner, safety and nickel.

"He's a physically minded football player," defensive coordinator **Clayton White** said. "He tries to knock people down. He's trying be a physical football player."

# GAMECOCKS SPRING ROSTER

| Quarterback | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15 Jason Brown | QB | 6-3 | 235 | Sr. | Fredericksburg, VA |
| 4 Luke Doty | QB | 6-1 | 204 | So. | Myrtle Beach |
| 10 Colten Gauthier | QB | 6-3 | 210 | Fr. | Bethlehem, GA |
| 14 Connor Jordan | QB | 6-3 | 210 | So. | Raleigh, NC |
| **Running Back** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 25 Rashad Amos | RB | 6-2 | 215 | Fr. | Fayetteville, GA |
| 32 Bradley Dunn | RB | 5-9 | 215 | Fr. | Columbia |
| 20 Kevin Harris | RB | 5-10 | 225 | Jr. | Hinesville, GA |
| 26 Nathan Harris-Waynick | RB | 5-10 | 210 | Fr. | Sumter |
| 1 MarShawn Lloyd | RB | 5-9 | 215 | Fr. | Wilmington, DE |
| 22 Bruce Staley | RB | 5-9 | 210 | Fr. | West Columbia |
| 11 ZaQuandre White | RB | 6-0 | 210 | Sr. | Cape Coral, FL |
| **Wide Receivers** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 16 Trey Adkins | WR | 5-11 | 175 | Jr. | Simpsonville |
| 81 Jalen Brooks | WR | 6-2 | 200 | Sr. | Harrisburg, NC |
| 7 Ahmarean Brown | WR | 5-9 | 165 | Jr. | Tampa. FL |
| 89 Ger-Cari Caldwell | WR | 6-5 | 200 | So. | Rock Hill |
| 8 Randrecous Davis | WR | 5-10 | 195 | Sr. | Atlanta, GA |
| 13 E.J. Jenkins | WR | 6-7 | 242 | Sr. | Fredericksburg, VA |
| 5 Dakereon Joyner | WR | 6-1 | 205 | Jr. | North Charleston |
| 17 Xavier Legette | WR | 6-0 | 212 | Jr. | Mullins |
| 85 Payton Mangrum | WR | 5-11 | 195 | Fr. | Greenville |
| 84 Rico Powers | WR | 6-2 | 190 | So. | Atlanta, GA |
| 3 Sam Reynolds | WR | 5-9 | 180 | Fr. | Alabaster, AL |
| 19 Ben Rollins | WR | 5-8 | 165 | Fr. | Inman |
| 18 OrTre Smith | WR | 6-4 | 227 | Sr. | Mount Pleasant |
| 86 Chad Terrell | WR | 6-3 | 212 | Sr. | Bogue Chitto, MS |
| 6 Josh Vann | WR | 5-10 | 195 | Sr. | Tucker, GA |
| 87 Mike Wyman | WR | 6-2 | 200 | Fr. | Greensboro, NC |
| **Tight Ends** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 49 Dave Adams | TE | 6-2 | 220 | Fr. | Gadsden |
| 23 Jaheim Bell | TE | 6-2 | 230 | So. | Lake City, FL |
| 12 Traevon Kenion | TE | 6-3 | 245 | So. | Monroe, NC |
| 80 Keveon Mullins | TE | 6-1 | 235 | So. | Memphis, TN |
| 9 Nick Muse | TE | 6-4 | 249 | Sr. | Belmont, NC |
| 83 Patrick Reedy | TE | 6-7 | 265 | Jr. | Columbia |
| 90 Jesse Sanders | TE | 6-3 | 240 | Fr. | Aiken |
| 35 Eric Shaw | TE | 6-4 | 215 | So. | Reeltown, AL |
| **Offensive Lineman** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 68 Wyatt Campbell | OL | 6-5 | 305 | Jr. | Elgin |
| 60 Jordan Davis | OL | 6-4 | 300 | Fr. | Fairburn, GA |
| 71 Eric Douglas | OL | 6-4 | 315 | Sr. | Charlotte, NC |
| 58 Mark Fox | OL | 6-4 | 310 | So. | Miami, FL |
| 54 Jovaughn Gwyn | OL | 6-2 | 300 | Jr. | Charlotte, NC |
| 72 Trai Jones | OL | 6-2 | 310 | Fr. | Abbeville |
| 77 Vershon Lee | OL | 6-3 | 310 | So. | Woodbridge, VA |
| 70 Hank Manos | OL | 6-4 | 305 | Jr. | Chapin |
| 55 Jakai Moore | OL | 6-5 | 310 | So. | Nokesville, VA |
| 74 Vincent Murphy | OL | 6-2 | 305 | So. | Fort Lauderdale, FL |
| 52 Jaylen Nichols | OL | 6-5 | 325 | Jr. | Charlotte, NC |
| 76 Jordan Rhodes | OL | 6-4 | 340 | Sr. | Fairburn, GA |
| 57 Will Rogers | OL | 6-3 | 300 | So. | Hampton, GA |
| 65 Chuck Strickland | OL | 6-1 | 265 | Fr. | Spartanburg |
| 75 Jazston Turnetine | OL | 6-7 | 340 | Sr. | Ellenwood, GA |
| 62 Tyshawn Wannamaker | OL | 6-3 | 335 | Fr. | St. Matthews |
| 79 Dylan Wonnum | OL | 6-5 | 305 | Sr. | Tucker, GA |
| **Defensive Lineman** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 93 Nick Barrett | DL | 6-2 | 310 | Fr. | Goldsboro, NC |
| 97 Devontae Davis | DL | 6-3 | 305 | Sr. | New Ellenton |
| 99 Jabari Ellis | DL | 6-3 | 275 | Sr. | Vance |
| 52 Kingsley Enagbare | DE | 6-4 | 260 | Sr. | Atlanta, GA |
| 11 Keem Green | DL | 6-3 | 315 | Sr. | Sumter |
| 91 Tonka Hemingway | DT | 6-3 | 270 | So. | Conway |
| 95 Alex Huntley | DL | 6-4 | 300 | Fr. | Blythewood |
| 6 Zacch Pickens | DL | 6-3 | 305 | Jr. | Anderson |
| 90 Rick Sandidge | DL | 6-5 | 310 | Sr. | Concord, NC |
| 15 Aaron Sterling | DE | 6-1 | 240 | Sr. | Atlanta, GA |
| 94 M.J. Webb | DL | 6-3 | 305 | Sr. | Rutledge, GA |
| **Linebackers** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 8 Jahmar Brown | LB | 6-1 | 210 | So. | Ft. Lauderdale, FL |
| 3 Jordan Burch | LB | 6-6 | 270 | So. | Columbia |
| 45 Spencer Eason-Riddle | LB | 6-0 | 226 | Sr. | Raleigh, NC |
| 55 Gilber Edmond | LB | 6-5 | 230 | Fr. | Fort Pierce, FL |
| 16 Rodricus Fitten | LB | 6-1 | 255 | So. | Atlanta, GA |
| 44 Sherrod Greene | LB | 6-1 | 220 | Sr. | Rocky Mount, NC |
| 19 Brad Johnson | LB | 6-2 | 235 | Sr. | Pendleton |
| 92 Tyreek Johnson | LB | 6-3 | 255 | So. | Sumter |
| 32 Mohamed Kaba | LB | 6-2 | 222 | So. | Clinton, NC |
| 42 Rosendo Louis Jr. | LB | 6-2 | 240 | Jr. | Deerfield Beach, FL |
| 48 Sean McGonigal | LB | 6-1 | 235 | Sr. | Myrtle Beach |
| 30 Damani Staley | LB | 6-0 | 246 | Sr. | Columbia |
| 7 Jordan Strachan | LB | 6-4 | 220 | Sr. | Kingsland, GA |
| 41 Darryle Ware | LB | 6-1 | 225 | Fr. | Charleston |
| 5 Debo Williams | LB | 6-1 | 230 | Fr. | Smyrna, DE |
| **Defensive Backs** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 49 James Bartholomew | DB | 5-9 | 180 | Sr. | Hilton Head |
| 24 Marcellas Dial | DB | 6-0 | 190 | So. | Woodruff |
| 4 Jaylin Dickerson | DB | 6-1 | 190 | Jr. | Southern Pines, NC |
| 47 King-Demenian Ford | DB | 6-2 | 197 | Fr. | Blythewood |
| 25 O'Donnell Fortune | DB | 6-1 | 180 | Fr. | Sumter |
| 27 Jaylan Foster | DB | 5-10 | 190 | Sr. | Duncan |
| 23 Fabian Goodman | DB | 5-10 | 170 | Fr. | Columbia |
| 26 Landon Grier | DB | 5-9 | 185 | Fr. | Fort Lauderdale, FL |
| 18 Dominick Hill | DB | 6-0 | 200 | So. | Orlando, FL |
| 14 Joey Hunter | DB | 6-0 | 200 | Fr. | Atlanta, GA |
| 10 R.J. Roderick | DB | 6-0 | 205 | Sr. | Summerville |
| 28 Darius Rush | DB | 6-2 | 195 | Jr. | Kingstree |
| 9 Cam Smith | DB | 6-0 | 187 | So. | Blythewood |
| 29 David Spaulding | DB | 6-1 | 190 | So. | Riceboro, GA |
| **Specialist** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 59 Matthew Bailey | LS | 6-1 | 210 | So. | Deland, FL |
| 47 Cole Hanna | PK | 5-7 | 185 | Jr. | Norcross, GA |
| 45 Alex Herrera | PK | 5-11 | 190 | So. | Columbia |
| 98 Mitch Jeter | PK | 5-10 | 190 | So. | Salisbury, NC |
| 39 Kai Kroeger | P | 6-3 | 200 | So. | Lake Forest, IL |
| 46 Cole Rasmussen | LS | 6-0 | 195 | Fr. | Fort Mill |
| 78 Hunter Rogers | LS | 6-1 | 200 | Fr. | Columbia |
| 43 Parker White | PK | 6-5 | 205 | Sr. | Mount Pleasant |

# OPPOSING COACHES VIEW

• "South Carolina is a complete train wreck. If you fire Will Muschamp to hire Shane Beamer, just keep Muschamp. (Athletic director) Ray Tanner gave Muschamp an extension and it cost the school a lot of money. Looking back, if a coach at Florida gets fired for taking down Florida, what in your mind makes you think he can make South Carolina better? …

• "I think South Carolina is in a period of 40 years wandering in the desert. They need new athletic administration. They've got great facilities; the boosters are some of best in world. When Lou Holtz went 0-11, the South Carolina fans were behind him. They deserve better.…

• "South Carolina had the worst defense in the SEC other than Ole Miss. Look at all the players they've had drafted on defense — Javon Kinlaw, D.J. Wonnum, Jaycee Horn, Ernest Jones, Israel Mukuamu — it's inexcusable how bad their defense has been."

# INDIVIDUAL STATS

## PASSING

| NAME | GP | Effic | Cmp | Att | Int | Pct | Yards | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| C. Hill | 8 | 117.8 | 127 | 215 | 6 | 59.1 | 1411 | 6 | 57 | 176.4 |
| L. Doty | 8 | 109.3 | 43 | 71 | 3 | 60.6 | 405 | 2 | 35 | 50.6 |

## RECEIVING

| RECEIVING | GP | No. | Yards | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S. Smith | 9 | 57 | 633 | 11.1 | 4 | 36 | 70.3 |
| N. Muse | 10 | 30 | 425 | 14.2 | 1 | 35 | 42.5 |
| K. Harris | 10 | 21 | 159 | 7.6 | 1 | 17 | 15.9 |

## RUSHING

| RUSHING | GP | Att. | Gain | Loss | Net | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K. Harris | 10 | 185 | 1178 | 40 | 1138 | 6.2 | 15 | 88 | 113.8 |
| D. Fenwick | 8 | 54 | 309 | 12 | 297 | 5.5 | 1 | 33 | 37.1 |
| R. Amos | 3 | 18 | 103 | 4 | 99 | 5.5 | 0 | 34 | 33.0 |

## DEF. LEADERS

Tackles: E. Jones 86, J. Robinson 74, D. Staley 51
Tackles for loss: K. Enagbare 7, K. Thomas 5.5, E. Jones 5
Sacks: K. Enagbare 6, K. Thomas 3, three tied with 1
Interceptions: J. Horne 2, C. Smith 2, I. Mukuamu 2

# 247SPORTS GAMECOCKS RECRUITING 2021

## 3 NEWCOMERS OF IMPACT

### E.J. Jenkins

South Carolina could use a big-bodied pass-catcher who can make plays in all areas of the field. Jenkins (6-7, 242) caught 44 passes for 831 yards and 13 touchdowns at Saint Francis in 2019. He arrived to Columbia as a wide receiver but has since moved to tight end.

### Carlins Platel

After a mass exodus, there are needs just about everywhere in the secondary. Platel, a graduate transfer from Assumption College, has seven career interceptions. At 6-foot-2, 190 pounds, he has prototypical size for the SEC, regardless of position. He was recruited to play at cornerback and nickel back under defensive coordinator Clayton White.

### Ahmarean Brown

Shi Smith was the fastest player on the team throughout the course of his career at South Carolina. Brown, a Georgia Tech transfer, might hold that distinction now. He caught eight touchdown passes in two seasons with the Yellow Jackets and, like Smith, could make a serious impact for the Gamecocks out of the slot.

## SLEEPER

### Isaiah Norris

Norris was a productive running back at TL Hanna High School in Anderson, S.C., before moving to defensive back at New Mexico Military Institute. He had four interceptions over eight games as a freshman then transferred to play the 2020 season at Georgia Military College, but the season was canceled due to the pandemic.

## 2022 NEEDS

Beamer's first full recruiting cycle will need to turn up prospects at every position. The current scholarship count at quarterback (three) makes that a position of need, though South Carolina will probably take just one. The biggest need, in terms of volume, would be defensive back. South Carolina's defensive staff was short-handed at the position all spring, and they're likely to enter the summer below their preferred scholarship allotment in the secondary. The Gamecocks certainly have a need for speed at wide receiver, too.

— By Hale McGranahan, TheBigSpur.com

## 247SPORTS COMPOSITE

| 5★ | 4★ | 3★ | 2★ |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 1 | 18 | 1 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Committments | 20 |
| Average Stars | 3.0 |
| Total Stars | 60 |
| National Rank: 80 | SEC: 14 |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Nick Barrett** | DL | 6-2 | 310 | ★★★ | Goldsboro, NC | Eastern Wayne |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 61 defensive tackle nationally and No. 48 player in North Carolina… 2020 season cancelled in North Carolina due to COVID… As a junior, had 70 tackles and 15 quarterback sacks. | | | | | | |
| **O'Mega Blake** | ATH | 6-1 | 188 | ★★★ | Rock Hill | South Pointe |
| Ranked No. 108 wide receiver nationally and No. 9 player in South Carolina by 247Sports.com… Had 1,272 total offensive yards and 12 touchdowns as a senior… Had 50 receptions for 709 yards… As a junior, had 38 receptions for 800 yards and 353 yards rushing… Had more than 1,300 all-purpose yards. | | | | | | |
| **Ahmarean Brown** | WR | 5-10 | 165 | ★★★ | Tampa, FL | Georgia Tech |
| Transfer… In two seasons, had 33 receptions for 619 yards and nine touchdowns for Georgia Tech… Led Yellow Jackets in receptions, receiving yards and scoring catches. | | | | | | |
| **Jason Brown** | QB | 6-3 | 235 | ★★★ | Fredericksburg, VA | St. Francis |
| Transfer… Pro-style quarterback, completed 251 of 403 passes for 3,084 yards and 28 touchdowns in 2019. | | | | | | |
| **La'Dareyen Craig** | DB | 6-2 | 175 | ★★★ | Mobile, AL | Baker |
| Played cornerback and wide receiver… As a senior, had nine passes broken up and three interceptions in eight games. | | | | | | |
| **Jordan Davis** | OL | 6-4 | 300 | ★★★ | Fairburn, GA | Creekside |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 124 offensive tackle nationally… As a senior, helped team to 7-3 record and state playoffs and blocked for rushing attack that averaged 283.9 yards per game and scored 28 total touchdowns.. | | | | | | |
| **Marcellas Dial** | DB | 6-0 | 190 | ★★★ | Woodruff | Georgia Military |
| Ranked No. 51 junior college player and No. 7 junior college cornerback nationally by 247Sports.com… Did not play in 2020 due to COVID… Will have three years eligibility remaining… In 2019, had five passes broken up and one interception in 11 games. | | | | | | |
| **Kolbe Fields** | OLB | 6-1 | 205 | ★★★ | New Orleans, LA | Archbishop Rummel |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 47 outside linebacker nationally and No. 24 player in Louisiana… Had 58 tackles, including six tackles for loss, and two quarterback sacks as a senior… Helped team to 6-2 record and playoff appearance… As a junior, had 105 tackles, including 10 tackles for loss, three interceptions and two fumbles caused… Helped team to undefeated season and state championship. | | | | | | |
| **Colten Gauthier** | QB | 6-3 | 210 | ★★★ | Bethlehem, GA | Hebron Christian Acad. |
| Ranked No. 23 pro-style quarterback nationally and No. 51 player in Georgia by 247Sports.com… Completed 444 of 811 career passes attempted for 6,541 yards and 61 touchdowns… Had 17 rushing touchdowns… As a senior, had 2,052 yards passing and 22 touchdowns… Had 2,401 yards passing and 20 touchdowns as a junior, leading team to state playoffs. | | | | | | |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Jahkeem Green** | DL | 6-5 | 320 | ★★★ | Sumter | Nebraska |
| Had 117 tackles in two seasons at Highland Community College… Had four tackles in eight games at Nebraska. | | | | | | |
| **E.J. Jenkins** | WR | 6-7 | 242 | ★★ | Fredericksburg, VA | Saint Francis Univ. |
| Had 44 receptions for 831 yards and 13 touchdowns in two seasons for the Red Flash. | | | | | | |
| **Tavareon Martin-Scott** | OLB | 6-3 | 215 | ★★★ | Ft. Wayne, IN | Dodge City CC |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 12 junior college player and No. 2 junior college outside linebacker nationally and No. 3 player in Indiana… School did not play football in 2020 due to COVID… Had 42 tackles, 3.5 quarterback sacks, two fumbles caused and one interception in 2019. | | | | | | |
| **Caleb (JuJu) McDowell** | RB | 5-8 | 180 | ★★★ | Leesburg, GA | Lee County |
| Ranked No. 42 running back nationally and No. 67 player in Georgia by 247Sports.com… Played running back, receiver, defensive back and returned kicks and punts… As a senior, had 800 yards rushing and 140 yards receiving scoring 16 touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Jon Darius Morgan** | OL | | 326 | ★★★ | Birmingham, AL | Huffman |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 106 offensive tackle nationally and No. 50 player in Alabama. | | | | | | |
| **Isaiah Norris** | DB | 6-0 | 170 | ★★★ | Anderson | Georgia Military |
| Ranked No. 71 junior college player and No. 8 junior college cornerback nationally by 247Sports.com… Had four interceptions in 2019. | | | | | | |
| **Sam Reynolds** | WR | 5-9 | 190 | ★★★ | Alabaster, AL | Thompson |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 35 player in Alabama… Played slot receiver, running back, nickel back and returned kicks… As a senior, helped team to 14-0 record and second consecutive state championship… Had more than 750 all-purpose yards, averaging 5.6 yards per carry and 17.9 yards per reception and scored 13 touchdowns… Had 36 receptions for 380 yards and five touchdowns as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **T.J. Sanders** | DL | 6-4 | 285 | ★★★ | Marion | Marion |
| Ranked No. 40 defensive tackle nationally and No. 8 player in South Carolina by 247Sports.com… Helped team to state championship game as a senior… Had team high 18 tackles for loss and six quarterback sacks… As a junior, had 26 tackles, including five tackles for loss, and two quarterback sacks. | | | | | | |
| **David Spaulding** | DB | 6-1 | 190 | ★★★ | Riceboro, GA | Georgia Southern |
| Had seven tackles and returned an interception 28 yards and a touchdown for Georgia Southern in 2020. | | | | | | |
| **Jordan Strachan** | LB | 6-4 | 220 | ★★★★ | Kingsland, GA | Georgia State |
| Had 14.5 tackles for loss and 10.5 quarterback sacks last season, which tied for the NCAA lead… Also, had 78 tackles and three fumbles caused. | | | | | | |
| **Darryl (Debo) Williams** | LB | 6-1 | 230 | ★★★ | Smyrna, DE | Delaware |
| Team did not play in 2020 due to COVID… As high school senior, was named Delaware Defensive Player of the Year when he was in on 153 tackles, including 32 tackles for loss, and eight quarterback sacks. | | | | | | |

# PLAYER PROFILE

## Worthy of the Hype? QB Doty Takes Reins

South Carolina needs sophomore Luke Doty to buck a recent trend.

Since 2013, the Gamecocks have signed six four-star quarterbacks — and none of the previous five have finished their career with the program at the position for which they were recruited. Four departed the programs.

Only one of those players, Jake Bentley, had any real success at the position. Dakereon Joyner is still on the Gamecocks' roster, but he's at wide receiver. Bentley features at or near the top of the South Carolina record books in various categories after starting from 2016-18, but he was cast off in favor of Ryan Hilinski, who left after a 2020 season when he couldn't beat out graduate transfer Collin Hill.

Doty, who took over as the team's starting quarterback for the final two games last season, is the next hope.

Even in his freshman year, Doty emerged as one of the leaders of the football team. His tremendous work ethic and engaging, energetic personality make him a favorite throughout the locker room.

"He's a very intelligent young man, understanding the offense and learning what we're asking of him to do," first-year head coach Shane Beamer said. "He's been fantastic. The poise, the confidence and the leadership have shown. He's been spectacular there."

Players won't follow leaders who don't know how to work and who don't know how to win. The Gamecocks were only 2-8 last season, and two of those losses came at the end of the season with Doty starting at quarterback.

That time on the field helped him grow as a player, and he received the bulk of the first-team reps this spring as South Carolina's starter. Beamer and offensive coordinator Marcus Satterfield believe in Doty, who knows that he still has a long way to go to be a winning quarterback in the SEC.

"Coming out of spring ball, we had a lot of good things as an offense, but I know there's a lot of stuff for me to personally get better at and improve myself," Doty said.

"It's about coming into work each and every day with a desire to get better and make everybody around me better. I'm going to continue to come to work, do as much as I can to bring energy and bring guys with me."

LUKE DOTY

Photo by Mike Weaver/Special to Courier USATNSYNDICATION

**For more coverage visit lindyssports.com/college-football/sec/south-carolina**

# BEST AND BRIGHTEST

## MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

### RB KEVIN HARRIS

A four-horse race to become the starting running back last season saw Harris not only win it, but become a top rusher in the country, leading the SEC in yards per game average. He is the first player in school history to accomplish that feat. … His 1,138 yards in only 10 games was fifth-best in the program's record books. … Top scholarship offers out of high school besides the Gamecocks were Air Force and Army.

## EMERGING STAR

### EDGE JORDAN BURCH

There's only one player who was rated higher than Burch in the 247Sports Composite who has signed with South Carolina, and that was eventual NFL No. 1 overall pick Jadeveon Clowney. … Burch served in a backup role last season and recorded 19 tackles in eight games, missing the final two contests with a hand injury. … The soft-spoken Burch gave his first interview in March since committing to the Gamecocks in December 2019.

## TOP NEWCOMER

### WR/TE E.J. JENKINS

He transferred to South Carolina with his quarterback, Jason Brown, in March after three seasons at FCS school St. Francis (Pa.). … Jenkins produced 44 catches for 831 yards and 13 touchdowns in his final season. … South Carolina will feature him in a pass-catching role and hopes he can compare to former Florida standout Kyle Pitts because of his versatility, size, speed and catch radius. … This will be his fifth year in college.

# ARKANSAS STATE | RED WOLVES

Sun Belt rank: 5 Record: 4-7 Sun Belt record: 2-6 (T-3rd, West) Stadium: Centennial Bank Stadium (30,382)

RANKING 104

## RED WOLVES at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Jonesboro, Ark.
**COACH:** Butch Jones — At Arkansas State: 1st year; overall: 84-54, 11 years
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Keith Heckendorf
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Rob Harley

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** 2016 Sun Belt co-champion
**LAST BOWL:** 2019 Camellia Bowl
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 12; 5 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB Layne Hatcher, RB Marcel Murray, WR Dahu Green, WR Jeff Foreman, WR Te'Vailance Hunt, TE Reed Tyler, DE TW Ayers, CB Samy Johnson, FS Elery Alexander
**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** Wide receiver is deep and talented. Hatcher is an accurate passer and had a higher rating in sharing time with starter Logan Bonner in 2020. QB James Blackman could add another dimension to the offense. The secondary looks to be the strength of the defense, though DT Terry Hampton and DEs Joe Ozougwu and Ayers have some pass-rushing skills.
**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** The running game is a question. Lincoln Pare (450 yards) and Murray both had health issues in 2020 when the Wolves rushed for just 125.4 yards a game. Some key holes need filling on the defensive front seven.

## OFFENSE

Junior Layne Hatcher, after splitting time with starter Logan Bonner the past two years, will face yet another challenge in 2021 as Arkansas State begins the Butch Jones coaching era.

Florida State graduate transfer James Blackman is on his way to Jonesboro, having committed in late January. Blackman had a spectacular freshman season, passing for 2,230 yards and 19 touchdowns in 2017, but he was in and out of the starting lineup over the next three seasons.

Hatcher won't concede the job easily. The 2019 Sun Belt Freshman of the Year passed for 2,058 yards to Bonner's 1,863 last year in completing just under 60 percent of his 194 attempts. He had 19 touchdown passes and just two interceptions.

The Red Wolves lost top receiver Jonathan Adams (79 catches, 1,111 yards and 12 scores) and Brandon Bowling (39-507-7), but return Dahu Green (32-542-5 in six starts). Corey Rucker had 16 receptions for 463 yards (28.3 yards per-catch) and Jeff Foreman had an even more impressive per catch average (33.8) on 13 receptions. TCU transfer Te'Vailance Hunt had a productive spring.

Lincoln Pare led the rushing attack with 450 yards as a freshman in 2020 before his season was cut short by injury, but veteran Marcel Murray looks to reclaim his spot after playing in only five games last year while dealing with ankle and leg injuries. He rushed for 820 yards in 2019.

The line is experienced with four returning starters.

## DEFENSE

The Red Wolves have two big holes to fill with the departures of first-team all-conference linebacker Justin Rice (76 tackles, 7.0 sacks) and second-team selection Forrest Merrill.

But the defense looks to benefit from the transfer pool with Tennessee tackle John Mincey having announced his intention to join the Red Wolves. Mincey played in 24 games for the Volunteers, recording eight tackles in 10 appearances last season.

**LAYNE HATCHER**
Photo by John Rivera/Icon Sportswire via AP Images

"This football team and this football program must get more physical. And it starts with me. We have to demand that."
— Coach Butch Jones

Safety Elery Alexander (No. 2 in tackles with 54), linebacker Jeffmario Brown (44 in eight games) and Terry Hampton (35 tackles) head the list of returnees. Hampton moves from end to tackle.

TW Ayers was second on the team in sacks with four and started the last four games at end. North Texas transfer end Joe Ozougwu recorded three sacks for the Mean Green in 2019.

Linebacker Caleb Bonner (five starts) finished with 24 tackles and a sack. He started all 13 games in 2019, recording 65 tackles. Cornerback Samy Johnson and safety Antonio Fletcher each had two interceptions.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Blake Grupe (11 of 18 on field goal attempts) and Ryan Hanson (40.6-yard average on punts) return to the kicking game. The Red Wolves are looking for new returners.

## OVERVIEW

The Red Wolves will be looking to rebound from an uncustomary losing record — their first since 2010 — but lost some key players with Bonner, Rice and Bowling following coach Blake Anderson to Utah State. Early games against Memphis, Washington and Tulsa could put them in an early hole.

## TOP NEWCOMER

**WR Te'Vailance Hunt**: A transfer from TCU, Hunt arrived in time for spring practice and emerged with a starting spot at wide receiver. He played in only three games for the Horned Frogs last year and caught just two passes for short gains. He had 20 receptions for 308 yards as a sophomore in 2019.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

### OFFENSE

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | 3 | Layne Hatcher | 6-0 | 196 | Jr. |
| RB | 34 | Marcel Murray | 5-11 | 197 | Sr. |
| WR | 10 | Te'Vailance Hunt | 6-3 | 200 | Jr. |
| WR | 7 | Corey Rucker | 6-2 | 190 | So. |
| WR | 13 | Jeff Foreman | 6-2 | 175 | Jr. |
| **TE** | **87** | **Reed Tyler*** | **6-3** | **245** | **Sr.** |
| LT | 72 | Nour-Eddine Seidnaly | 6-5 | 324 | Sr. |
| **LG** | **74** | **Andre Harris Jr.*** | **6-5** | **315** | **Sr.** |
| **C** | **64** | **Jacob Still*** | **6-1** | **296** | **Sr.** |
| **RG** | **70** | **Ivory Scott*** | **6-4** | **315** | **Sr.** |
| **RT** | **60** | **Wyatt Luebke*** | **6-5** | **264** | **Sr.** |

### DEFENSE

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | 93 | Joe Ozougwu | 6-3 | 285 | Sr. |
| **DT** | **97** | **Terry Hampton*** | **6-0** | **293** | **Sr.** |
| DT | 42 | Vidal Scott | 6-2 | 295 | Sr. |
| DE | 45 | TW Ayers | 6-2 | 250 | Jr. |
| LB | 22 | Caleb Bonner | 6-1 | 213 | Sr. |
| **LB** | **28** | **Jeffmario Brown*** | **6-3** | **229** | **Sr.** |
| LB | 12 | CJ Harris | 6-0 | 218 | So. |
| CB | 15 | Booker Ficklin | 6-2 | 190 | Sr. |
| **CB** | **1** | **Samy Johnson*** | **5-10** | **175** | **Jr.** |
| **SS** | **14** | **Antonio Fletcher*** | **6-0** | **187** | **Sr.** |
| **FS** | **10** | **Elery Alexander*** | **6-0** | **190** | **Sr.** |

### SPECIAL TEAMS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **K** | **0** | **Blake Grupe*** | **5-8** | **150** | **Sr.** |
| **P** | **48** | **Ryan Hanson*** | **6-2** | **212** | **So.** |

*Returning starters in Bold

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | CENTRAL ARKANSAS |
| Sept. 11 | MEMPHIS |
| Sept. 18 | at Washington |
| Sept. 25 | at Tulsa |
| Oct. 2 | at Georgia Southern |
| Oct. 7 | COASTAL CAROLINA |
| Oct. 21 | LOUISIANA |
| Oct. 30 | at South Alabama |
| Nov. 6 | APPALACHIAN STATE |
| Nov. 13 | at Louisiana Monroe |
| Nov. 20 | at Georgia State |
| Nov. 27 | TEXAS STATE |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| L | at Memphis | 24-37 |
| W | at Kansas State | 35-31 |
| L | at Coastal Carolina | 23-52 |
| W | CENTRAL ARKANSAS | 50-27 |
| W | GEORGIA STATE | 59-52 |
| L | at Appalachian State | 17-45 |
| L | TROY | 10-38 |
| L | at Louisiana | 20-27 |
| L | at Texas State | 45-47 |
| L | SOUTH ALABAMA | 31-38 |
| W | LOUISIANA MONROE | 48-15 |
| | INCARNATE WORD | CAN |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 32.9 | 35 |
| Rushing | 125.4 | 103 |
| Passing | 364.4 | 2 |
| Total | 489.7 | 14 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 37.2 | 111 |
| Rushing | 156.1 | T-53 |
| Passing | 314.0 | 126 |
| Total | 470.1 | 115 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 4 | - 0.36 | T-91 |

# TENNESSEE VOLUNTEERS

For more coverage of the Volunteers, visit tennessee.247Sports.com

**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Alex Golesh **DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Tim Banks **STADIUM:** Neyland Stadium: 102,455

## HEUPEL BRINGING HIGH-OCTANE ATTACK TO UT REBUILD

The SEC hired four new coaches during the offseason, but none faces a bigger rebuilding job than Josh Heupel at Tennessee.

A once proud football power, Tennessee went 3-7 last season, fired head coach Jeremy Pruitt amid NCAA recruiting violation allegations, dismissed nine other staffers and parted ways with athletic director Phillip Fulmer.

The Vols haven't won the SEC since 1998, haven't won the East Division since 2007 and have recorded just two winning records in SEC play in the past 13 years. To add insult to injury, Tennessee was invited to play in the Liberty Bowl — even with a 3-7 record — but had to decline after a COVID-19 outbreak.

A resolution to the NCAA violations remained unresolved entering the summer. UT hired noted attorney Mike Glacier to spearhead an internal investigation with hopes of mitigating pending punishment.

The problems didn't stop there in the offseason. More than 30 players entered the transfer portal, four others got a release from National Letters of Intent signed in December and four players were suspended before spring practice started over a dorm room incident.

When will the nightmare end?

The Vols hope this is the beginning of the end:

In January, Tennessee hired Central Florida athletic director Danny White, who — after a "national" search — hired his coach at UCF, Josh Heupel. All the circumstances might give Heupel, known for his offensive innovation and high-octane attack, a longer leash with which to rebuild.

UCF ranked among the nation's best on offense for three years under Heupel, who previously took a poor Missouri offense and turned it into the SEC leader in total yards in his second year as the Tigers' offensive coordinator in 2017. At Missouri, he once put up 50 points and 659 yards in a win against Tennessee.

Heupel brought most of his offensive staff from UCF and should vastly improve on UT's average of 21.5 points and 346.2 total yards from last season. Heupel pursued only one from his defensive staff, secondary coach Willie Martinez.

Heupel's initial — and modest — goal is to get Tennessee to a bowl game.

### OFFENSE

Whether Heupel can generate offensive success at Tennessee remains to be seen. He must first find a quarterback.

A spring battle included Virginia Tech transfer Hendon Hooker and two holdovers with limited starting experience: Brian Maurer and Harrison Bailey. Highly touted recruit Kaidon Salter was suspended from spring ball after his involvement in a dorm room incident. UT also added talented Michigan transfer Joe Milton in April.

Heupel said the three spring quarterbacks made improvement in "light years" in the first few weeks of practice in terms of operating and understanding the fast-paced attack.

Bailey had the best spring game: 12 of 15 for 260 yards and two touchdowns. Maurer, who is the most athletic, was 9 of 15 for 171 yards. Hooker was 10 of 14 for 111 yards with a TD run and pass.

Hooker had two 100-yard rushing games at Virginia Tech last year. Heupel must figure out a way to incorporate Hooker's legs in the scheme.

Heupel's quarterback criteria, in order, is finding someone who understands the offense and makes quick decisions, then accuracy, then mobility.

Heupel likes what he has seen from his running backs, particularly scatback Jabari Small and the 6-foot-5 Dee Beckwith, who is surprisingly elusive given his size.

Running backs coach Jerry Mack said Small was "born to be an RB." Small had 48 yards and two touchdowns on 12 carries in the spring game. He will be asked to replace the production of Eric Gray, who had 772 yards and caught 30 passes before transferring to Oklahoma.

Small carried 26 times for 117 yards last season.

Tiyon Evans, rated the No. 1 junior college running back in the 247Sports Com-

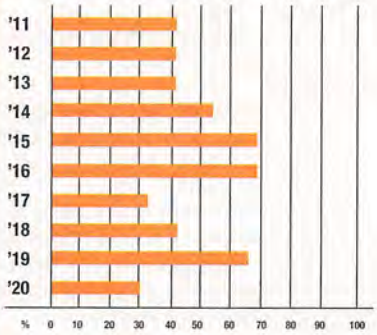
## SCHEDULE

| Date | Opponent | '20 Record |
|---|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | BOWLING GREEN | 0-5 |
| Sept. 11 | PITTSBURGH | 6-5 |
| Sept. 18 | TENNESSEE TECH | 2-5 |
| Sept. 25 | at Florida | 8-4 |
| Oct. 2 | at Missouri | 5-5 |
| Oct. 9 | SOUTH CAROLINA | 2-8 |
| Oct. 16 | OLE MISS | 5-5 |
| Oct. 23 | at Alabama | 13-0 |
| Nov. 6 | at Kentucky | 5-6 |
| Nov. 13 | GEORGIA | 8-2 |
| Nov. 20 | SOUTH ALABAMA | 4-7 |
| Nov. 27 | VANDERBILT | 0-9 |

## RESULTS

| 3-7, 3-7 | | |
|---|---|---|
| W | at South Carolina | 31-27 |
| W | MISSOURI | 35-12 |
| L | at Georgia | 21-44 |
| L | KENTUCKY | 7-34 |
| L | ALABAMA | 17-48 |
| L | at Arkansas | 13-24 |
| L | at Auburn | 17-30 |
| L | FLORIDA | 19-31 |
| W | at Vanderbilt | 42-17 |
| L | TEXAS A&M | 13-34 |

## 10-YEAR WINNING TREND



## AT A GLANCE

**LOCATION:**
Knoxville, Tenn.

**2020:**
3-7 overall, 3-7 SEC (5th, East)

**COACH:**
Josh Heupel — At Tennessee: 1st year; overall: 28-8, 3 years

**RETURNING STARTERS:** 11; 3 offense, 7 defense, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:**
RB Jabari Small, WR Velus Jones Jr., WR Jalin Hyatt, OL Cade Mays, DE Byron Young, DL Matthew Butler, CB Alontae Taylor

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:**
After ranking 13th in the SEC in scoring, Tennessee might be able to put more points on the board, thanks to Heupel's offensive reputation. He usually finds a way to get production from his quarterback, and he has brought in some talented players. UT is solid at running back and receiver.

**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:**
Whoever the quarterback is will have to flip the switch pretty quickly and the offensive line that underachieved last year is a bigger concern than ever. On defense, the Vols had just two scholarship LBs for most of the spring. The secondary has talent, but didn't play well together last year.

**KEY LOSSES:**
RB Eric Gray, RB Ty Chandler, WR Josh Palmer, OL Trey Smith, OL Wanya Morris, LB Henry To'o To'o, LB Quavaris Crouch, LB Deandre Johnson, DB Key Lawrence

**OVERVIEW:**
The Vols have recorded just two winning records in SEC play in the past 13 years. After going 8-4 in 2019, they seemed poised for a breakthrough, but instead they imploded, leading to a complete reset.

**KEY NUMBER:**
**4** The number of bowl appearances for Tennessee in the past 10 seasons, under three different head coaches.

**QB**
**Harrison BAILEY**
Photo by Randy Sartin-USA TODAY Sports

**Trevon Flowers**

Photo by Brianna Paciorka/The Knoxville News-Sentinel / USATNSYNDICATION

## SCOUTING REPORT: Offense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | Hendon Hooker | Sr. | Va. Tech transfer had two 150-yard rush games in 2020. | Harrison Bailey, So. |
| RB | Jabari Small | So. | Had a big spring; elusive, fast, strong. | Tiyon Evans, Jr. |
| WR | **Velus Jones Jr.*** | Sr. | Ex-USC transfer is leading returning receiver; strong on KOR. | Jimmy Calloway, So. |
| WR | Jalin Hyatt | So. | Team's best deep threat showed flashes last season. | Jimmy Holiday, So. |
| WR | Cedric Tillman | Jr. | Buried in deep chart, Tillman had productive spring. | JaVonta Payton, Sr. |
| TE | Austin Pope | Sr. | Missed last year due to back injury, excellent blocker. | Princeton Fant, Sr. |
| LT | Dayne Davis | So. | Former walk-on emerged as a starter with a strong spring. | Riley Locklear, Sr. |
| LG | Javontez Spraggins | So. | One of UT's most physical run blockers; has lost 40 pounds. | Jerome Carvin, Sr. |
| C | Cooper Mays | So. | Has center skills; has added 30 pounds to get to 295. | Ollie Lane, Jr. |
| RG | **Cade Mays*** | Sr. | Versatile OL; can play all 5 spots; needs to improve pass pro. | K'Rojhn Calbert, Sr. |
| RT | **Darnell Wright*** | Jr. | Former 5-star needs to get in shape, be more committed. | William Parker, Fr. |
| K | Chase McGrath | Sr. | USC transfer has made 32 of 42 FGs, 118 of 119 PATs. | Toby Wilson, Jr. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

## SCOUTING REPORT: Defense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| DL | **Matthew Butler*** | Sr. | Leading tackler (43) and most sacks (2) among DL. | Greg Emerson, Jr. |
| DL | **Aubrey Solomon*** | Sr. | Former 5-star hasn't emerged but does decent job up front. | Omari Thomas, So. |
| DL | Elijah Simmons | So. | Down from 360 to 330, he's team's best inside run stopper. | Ja'Quain Blakely, Sr. |
| DL | **LaTrell Bumphus*** | Sr. | Finally found home at DL; productive when healthy. | Bryson Eason, So. |
| LB | Byron Young | Jr. | JC transfer was spring surprise, standout pass rusher. | Solon Page III, Sr. |
| LB | Juwan Mitchell | Sr. | Texas transfer led Longhorns in tackles, could do same at UT. | Jeremy Banks, Jr. |
| LB | Tyler Baron | So. | Came on late last year; good pass rushing skills; solid vs. run. | Roman Harrison, Jr. |
| CB | **Alontae Taylor*** | Sr. | Good cover skills, 1 of 2 returners with an interception. | Doneiko Slaughter, So. |
| CB | Kenneth George Jr. | Sr. | Led team with six pass breakups; good in man coverage. | Warren Burrell, Jr. |
| S | **Jaylen McCollough*** | Jr. | Big hitter needs to be more consistent in coverage. | Tamarion McDonald, So. |
| S | **Theo Jackson*** | Sr. | One of two returners with a pick; plays with good instincts. | **Trevon Flowers, Sr.*** |
| P | **Paxton Brooks*** | Sr. | Third-leading returning punter in SEC with 43.6 average. | Marshall Ware, So. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

posite rankings, was limited in the spring but displayed big-time talent. Evans and Small could form a solid one-two punch. Freshman Jaylen Wright is a speedster.

The receiving corps has talent, but most remain unproven.

Senior Velus Jones Jr. (22 catches for 280 yards last season) and Jalin Hyatt could emerge as the leading pass catchers. Jimmy Holiday and Jimmy Callaway are athletic but didn't play much as true freshmen. Malachi Wideman is a big body with potential.

Tennessee added two receivers who could make the rotation: Mississippi State transfer JaVonta Payton, who had 19 catches last season, six in the season opener against LSU; and junior college transfer Andison Coby, a deep ball threat. Redshirt junior Cedric Tillman had a productive spring.

Tight end Austin Pope, a multiyear starter, returns after missing last season due to injury. Princeton Fant caught four passes in the spring game and could emerge as a starter.

The offensive line, which underachieved last season, lost Trey Smith (NFL) and Wanya Morris (transfer to Oklahoma).

Tennessee has two former five-stars on the line: Cade Mays, a Georgia transfer, and Darnell Wright. Neither played at a high level last year. Mays is better suited for guard but might be forced to play tackle. At 335 pounds, Wright appeared to be overweight. He must get in shape to endure Heupel's hurry-up offense.

Former walk-on Dayne Davis was the starting left tackle during the spring. If he can hold that spot, and Wright ups his play at right tackle, Mays and Jerome Carvin could start at the guards with Cooper Mays, Cade's younger brother, at center. Guard Javontez Spraggins is a potential starter.

## DEFENSE

While the offense has a chance to be productive, the defense is a major concern. Jeremy Pruitt fired defensive line coach Jimmy Brumbaugh four games into last season and took over the position, but it didn't seem to improve matters.

The defensive line returns five seniors with starting experience, led by Matthew Butler, Aubrey Solomon, Darel Middleton, LaTrell Bumphus and Ja'Quain Blakely. Butler was by far the most productive defensive lineman with 43 tackles and two sacks. No one else had more than 17 tackles.

Two bright spots in the spring were pass rusher Byron Young, a junior college transfer, and 330-pound run-stopper Elijah Simmons.

The defensive line recorded only seven of the team's 20 sacks last year (linebackers had 11).

UT lost two starting linebackers to the transfer portal (Henry To'o To'o and Quavaris Crouch). Two potential starters missed most of the spring due to injury (Jeremy Banks and Roman Harrison). Two others were suspended after a dorm-room incident (Aaron Willis and Martavius French). Another was suspended over animal cruelty (Aaron Beasley). French has since transferred.

To'o To'o ended up at Alabama; Crouch will go to Michigan State.

At outside linebacker, Bryson Eason, at

## TOP 5 NFL PROSPECTS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Cade Mays** | **OG** | **6-6** | **325** | **5.28** | **Sr.** |

An experienced, versatile blocker, Mays has lined up at four different positions along the offensive line during his collegiate career. After two seasons at Georgia, he decided to join his brother (Cooper) at Tennessee, where his dad (Kevin) also starred and was a team captain for the Vols. Cade Mays has since paved his own path to greatness, while showcasing his size, strength and tenacity.

With 32 career games played and 25 starts under his belt in the SEC, Mays is a proven road-grader who relies heavily upon his power to move defenders at will. He is a finisher. He began at right tackle last season before kicking inside and missing the final two games due to a lower-leg injury. He will need to prove to be durable but the Knoxville native owns first-round potential as a guard at the next level.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2. Darnell Wright** | **OL** | **6-6** | **335** | **5.30** | **Jr.** |
| **3. Alontae Taylor** | **CB** | **6-0** | **193** | **4.49** | **Sr.** |
| **4. Velus Jones Jr.** | **WR** | **6-0** | **200** | **4.49** | **Sr.** |
| **5. Trevon Flowers** | **S** | **5-11** | **204** | **4.55** | **Sr.** |

— Ric Serritella, NFL Draft Bible

275 pounds, has likely played his way to defensive end.

Tennessee got a huge transfer in linebacker Juwan Mitchell, who led Texas in tackles last year. He could lead another UT in tackles this fall. Other key linebackers figure to be Jeremy Banks and Solon Page III.

The Vols were so thin at linebacker during the spring, deep snapper Will Albright got some snaps there.

The secondary has some talent, led by cornerbacks Alontae Taylor, Kenneth George and Warren Burrell, and safeties Trevon Flowers, Theo Jackson and Jalen McCullough.

Burrell had a pick-six during the spring game. Flowers was second on the team with 62 tackles. George had a team-high six passes broken up. Each has starting experience, but none appears to be All-SEC caliber.

Tennessee's defense was 11th in the SEC in passing yards allowed per game last season, when it surrendered 15 touchdown passes while recording just five interceptions. Opponents completed 68.2 percent of their passes.

New defensive coordinator Tim Banks said he wants to simplify the defense so the unit won't have as many busts as it did a year ago.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Punter Paxton Brooks is the third-leading returning punter in the SEC after averaging 43.6 yards last season. Velus Jones Jr. ranked sixth in the SEC in kick returns with an average of 22.1 yards. The punt returner has not been identified.

The place-kicking battle is between Toby Wilson, who was handed the job late last season after Brent Cimaglia opted out, and USC transfer Chase McGrath.

Wilson has yet to make a college field goal. McGrath was USC's special teams Player of the Year in 2019 after making 14 of 17 field goal attempts and all 54 extra points, but he lost his job in 2020 to a freshman after suffering hip and knee injuries in fall camp.

### 2018 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 22.8 | 108 |
| Rushing | 129.1 | 113 |
| Passing | 196.4 | 96 |
| Total | 325.5 | 121 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 27.9 | 77 |
| Rushing | 154.5 | 52 |
| Passing | 222.9 | 60 |
| Total | 377.4 | 49 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| -1 | -0.08 | T-77 |

### 2019 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 24.2 | 98 |
| Rushing | 144.2 | T-87 |
| Passing | 221.4 | 75 |
| Total | 365.5 | 100 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 21.7 | 29 |
| Rushing | 140.5 | 48 |
| Passing | 194.0 | 16 |
| Total | 334.5 | 23 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| -1 | -0.08 | T-70 |

### 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 21.5 | 108 |
| Rushing | 141.5 | T-84 |
| Passing | 204.7 | 85 |
| Total | 346.2 | 102 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 30.1 | 69 |
| Rushing | 141.6 | 41 |
| Passing | 265.8 | 106 |
| Total | 407.4 | 65 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| -5 | -0.50 | T-97 |

WR
**Velus Jones Jr.**
Photo by Randy Sartin-USA TODAY Sports

## SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

Tennessee went 3-7 against an all-SEC schedule, but five of those teams didn't finish above .500.

The schedule lightens up as the Vols face non-SEC foes Bowling Green (0-5), Tennessee Tech (2-5) and South Alabama (4-7). Pitt (6-5) could be a swing game in determining if the Vols become bowl eligible.

Tennessee travels to defending East champ Florida and defending national champ Alabama, as well as Missouri and Kentucky. Home SEC games are against South Carolina, Ole Miss, Georgia and Vanderbilt.

Ole Miss coach Lane Kiffin makes his return to Neyland Stadium as a head coach (he did so twice as Alabama's offensive coordinator) for the first time since he abruptly left Rocky Top following the 2009 season.

— Jimmy Hyams

# NOTEBOOK

Tennessee lost over 25 players to the transfer portal but gained five by the middle of May, including quarterback **Joe Milton** from Michigan, linebacker **Juwan Mitchell** (who led Texas in tackles) and a cornerback from Auburn (**Kamal Hadden**).

UT also got USC transfer kicker **Chase McGrath**, a two-year starter for the Trojans who lost his job after an injury.

• Tennessee did not have much separation at the quarterback position during the spring. Virginia Tech transfer **Hendon Hooker** was No. 1 most of the spring, but was the third-best QB during the spring game. **Harrison Bailey**, who was third team, had the best spring game, followed by **Brian Maurer**. Two other QBs could figure in the mix: freshman **Kaidon Salter**, who was suspended in the spring, and Milton.

• Tennessee had five players suspended for spring ball, four due to a dorm room incident in which a person was assaulted and items were stolen. Two of the suspended have since transferred. A fifth was suspended for an animal cruelty charge. As of mid-May, coach **Josh Heupel** said the suspended players were having to earn their way back onto the roster.

• As Tennessee awaits its fate with the NCAA after self-reporting over 50 violations, recruiting has suffered. The Vols had just five commitments through May 19, each a three-star. Of the top 20 players in the state of Tennessee, seven had committed; UT didn't get any. UT hopes to have a resolution regarding its punishment by Sept. 1.

• The Vols gained more than 800 yards on 99 spring-game snaps. But the defense is a major concern. The Vols used a 4-3 and a 4-2-5 during the spring. The defense will be multiple but the Vols are weak at linebacker and don't have much depth in the secondary.

• Tennessee had only two players taken in the 2021 NFL Draft. WR **Josh Palmer** went in the third round to the Chargers and guard **Trey Smith** went in the sixth round to the Chiefs. UT has had just 13 players selected in the past seven years. By comparison, Alabama had 10 taken in the 2021 draft.

# VOLUNTEERS SPRING ROSTER

| Quarterback | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15 Harrison Bailey | QB | 6-5 | 220 | So. | Marietta, GA |
| 5 Hendon Hooker | QB | 6-4 | 218 | Sr. | Greensboro, NC |
| 18 Brian Maurer | QB | 6-3 | 205 | So. | Ocala, FL |
| 12 Sully McDermott | QB | 6-4 | 212 | Fr. | Waxhaw, NC |
| 7 Kaidon Salter | QB | 6-1 | 190 | Fr. | Cedar Hill, TX |
| 14 Spencer Smith | QB | 6-1 | 200 | So. | Germantown |
| **Running Back** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 21 Dee Beckwith | RB | 6-5 | 227 | Fr. | Florence, AL |
| 8 Tiyon Evans | RB | 5-11 | 220 | Jr. | Hartsville, SC |
| 44 Tee Hodge | RB | 6-1 | 218 | Fr. | Maryville |
| 25 Antonio Malone | RB | 5-10 | 216 | Fr. | Murfreesboro |
| 40 Fred Orr | RB | 5-11 | 212 | So. | Valdosta, GA |
| 28 Marcus Pierce | RB | 5-8 | 195 | Sr. | Dallas, TX |
| 20 Jabari Small | RB | 5-11 | 206 | So. | Memphis |
| 27 Len'Neth Whitehead | RB | 6-2 | 225 | Fr. | Athens, GA |
| 23 Jaylen Wright | RB | 5-11 | 200 | Fr. | Durham, NC |
| **Wide Receivers** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 17 Michael Bittner | WR | 6-2 | 222 | So. | Cincinnati, OH |
| 9 Jimmy Calloway | WR | 6-0 | 190 | So. | Morrow, GA |
| 82 Andison Coby | WR | 6-2 | 180 | So. | Fort Lauderdale, FL |
| 36 Tanner Dobrucky | WR | 5-9 | 193 | Sr. | Richmond, VA |
| 38 Grant Frerking | WR | 6-5 | 211 | Sr. | Atlanta, GA |
| 10 Jimmy Holiday | WR | 6-0 | 205 | So. | Flora, MS |
| 11 Jalin Hyatt | WR | 6-0 | 175 | So. | Irmo, SC |
| 22 Jack Jancek | WR | 6-5 | 220 | Fr. | Knoxville |
| 1 Velus Jones Jr. | WR | 6-0 | 200 | Sr. | Saraland, AL |
| 80 Ramel Keyton | WR | 6-3 | 195 | Jr. | Marietta, GA |
| 19 Walker Merrill | WR | 6-1 | 190 | Fr. | Brentwood |
| 26 J.T. Siekerman | WR | 5-10 | 180 | Sr. | Douglasville, GA |
| 31 Kenney Solomon | WR | 6-0 | 185 | Jr. | Myrtle Beach, SC |
| 4 Cedric Tillman | WR | 6-3 | 215 | Jr. | Las Vegas, NV |
| 13 Malachi Wideman | WR | 6-4 | 200 | So. | Sarasota, FL |
| **Tight Ends** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 86 Miles Campbell | TE | 6-1 | 245 | Fr. | Douglasville, GA |
| 88 Princeton Fant | TE | 6-2 | 240 | Sr. | Nashville |
| 81 Austin Pope | TE | 6-4 | 243 | Sr. | Knoxville |
| 89 Hunter Salmon | TE | 6-5 | 245 | So. | Birmingham, AL |
| 87 Jacob Warren | TE | 6-6 | 251 | Jr. | Knoxville |
| **Offensive Lineman** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 77 Chris Akporoghene | OL | 6-3 | 305 | So. | Warri, Nigeria |
| 65 Parker Ball | OL | 6-4 | 290 | So. | Douglasville, GA |
| 67 Jacob Brigman | OL | 6-2 | 315 | Fr. | Chattanooga |
| 74 K'Rojhn Calbert | OL | 6-5 | 315 | Sr. | McMinnville |
| 75 Jerome Carvin | OL | 6-5 | 313 | Sr. | Memphis |
| 66 Dayne Davis | OL | 6-7 | 325 | So. | Bluff City |
| 54 Kingston Harris | OL | 6-3 | 320 | Jr. | Orlando, FL |
| 50 Jackson Lampley | OL | 6-4 | 325 | So. | Nashville |
| 78 Ollie Lane | OL | 6-4 | 325 | Jr. | Corryton |
| 56 Riley Locklear | OL | 6-4 | 295 | Sr. | Huntington, WV |
| 68 Cade Mays | OL | 6-6 | 325 | Sr. | Knoxville |
| 63 Cooper Mays | OL | 6-3 | 295 | So. | Knoxville |
| 64 William Parker | OL | 6-5 | 330 | Fr. | Nashville |
| 69 James Parsons | OL | 6-5 | 320 | So. | Kings Mountain, NC |
| 70 RJ Perry | OL | 6-6 | 325 | Fr. | Fairfield, AL |
| 71 James Robinson | OL | 6-4 | 335 | Fr. | Montgomery, AL |
| 76 Javontez Spraggins | OL | 6-3 | 318 | So. | East St. Louis, IL |
| 72 Darnell Wright | OL | 6-6 | 335 | Jr. | Huntington, WV |
| **Defensive Lineman** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 59 Dominic Bailey | DL | 6-3 | 290 | Fr. | Baltimore, MD |
| 48 Ja'Quain Blakely | DL | 6-2 | 280 | Sr. | Moultrie, GA |
| 88 LaTrell Bumphus | DL | 6-3 | 295 | Sr. | Savannah |
| 94 Matthew Butler | DL | 6-4 | 295 | Sr. | Raleigh, NC |
| 20 Bryson Eason | DL | 6-2 | 275 | So. | Memphis |
| 90 Greg Emerson | DL | 6-3 | 290 | Jr. | Jackson |
| 79 Kurott Garland | DL | 6-3 | 310 | Jr. | Conyers, GA |
| 96 Isaac Green | DL | 6-0 | 296 | So. | Memphis |
| 93 Deven Jones | DL | 6-4 | 315 | Fr. | Knoxville |
| 97 Darel Middleton | DL | 6-7 | 305 | Sr. | Knoxville |
| 51 Elijah Simmons | DL | 6-2 | 330 | So. | Memphis |
| 98 Aubrey Solomon | DL | 6-5 | 320 | Sr. | Leesburg, GA |
| 58 Omari Thomas | DL | 6-4 | 316 | So. | Memphis |
| 95 Isaac Washington | DL | 6-3 | 280 | Fr. | Pilot Mountain, NC |
| **Linebackers** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 33 Jeremy Banks | LB | 6-1 | 235 | Jr. | Cordova |
| 9 Tyler Baron | LB | 6-5 | 257 | So. | Knoxville |
| 24 Aaron Beasley | LB | 6-1 | 225 | Jr. | Franklin, GA |
| 15 Kwauze Garland | LB | 6-1 | 220 | So. | Conyers, GA |
| 30 Roman Harrison | LB | 6-2 | 235 | Jr. | Bainbridge, GA |
| 37 Nick Humphrey | LB | 6-1 | 216 | Sr. | Monroe, MI |
| 19 Morven Joseph | LB | 6-2 | 215 | So. | Lakeland, FL |
| 38 Solon Page III | LB | 6-2 | 220 | Sr. | Atlanta, GA |
| 39 West Shuler | LB | 6-1 | 225 | So. | Knoxville |
| 55 Eunique Valentine | LB | 6-3 | 220 | Fr. | Knoxville |
| 41 Aaron Willis | LB | 5-11 | 225 | Fr. | Midlothian, VA |
| 13 Byron Young | LB | 6-3 | 240 | Jr. | Hemingway, SC |
| **Defensive Backs** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 25 Chayce Bishop | DB | 5-11 | 190 | Fr. | Thompson's Station |
| 35 Will Brooks | DB | 6-1 | 200 | Fr. | Birmingham, AL |
| 4 Warren Burrell | DB | 6-0 | 190 | Jr. | Suwanee, GA |
| 14 Christian Charles | DB | 6-1 | 186 | Fr. | Gainesville, GA |
| 7 Romello Edwards | DB | 6-0 | 187 | Jr. | Philadelphia, PA |
| 17 Tyus Fields | DB | 5-10 | 186 | So. | Cornelius, NC |
| 1 Trevon Flowers | DB | 5-11 | 204 | Sr. | Atlanta, GA |
| 5 Kenneth George Jr. | DB | 5-11 | 203 | Sr. | Lafayette, LA |
| 26 Theo Jackson | DB | 6-2 | 203 | Sr. | Nashville |
| 8 Bradley Jones | DB | 6-2 | 200 | Sr. | Nashville |
| 44 Cheyenne Labruzza | DB | 5-11 | 200 | Sr. | Albany, LA |
| 22 Jaylen McCollough | DB | 6-0 | 205 | Jr. | Austell, GA |
| 21 Tamarion McDonald | DB | 6-2 | 200 | So. | Memphis |
| 34 Trel Riley | DB | 6-1 | 180 | Fr. | Princeton, KY |
| 18 Doneiko Slaughter | DB | 6-0 | 190 | So. | Roswell, GA |
| 2 Alontae Taylor | DB | 6-0 | 193 | Sr. | Manchester |
| 36 William Wright | DB | 6-0 | 190 | Fr. | Nashville |
| **Specialist** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 46 Will Albright | LS | 6-1 | 220 | Fr. | Greeneville |
| 37 Paxton Brooks | P/PK | 6-6 | 195 | Sr. | Lexington, SC |
| 41 JT Carver | PK | 5-11 | 190 | Fr. | Martin |
| 42 Chase McGrath | PK | 6-0 | 198 | Sr. | Newport Beach, CA |
| 47 Grant Reid | LS | 6-1 | 230 | Fr. | Chattanooga |
| 52 Matthew Salansky | LS | 5-11 | 244 | So. | Morristown |
| 43 Marshall Ware | PK | 5-10 | 180 | So. | Germantown |
| 39 Toby Wilson | PK | 5-10 | 182 | Jr. | Brentwood |

# OPPOSING COACHES VIEW

• "I like Josh Heupel. He is going to be good on offense. My concern with Josh is his ability to recruit in an SEC environment. He has no clue. Hiring (defensive line coach) Rodney Garner helps because he's one of the founding fathers of SEC recruiting. I don't know much about (defensive coordinator) Tim Banks from Penn State. It will be interesting to see what he can do with what he has. So many (defensive players) entered the transfer portal. …

• "Tennessee hasn't been Tennessee since the year (in 2007) before (Phillip) Fulmer got fired (2008). It's just going to take a while for Tennessee to get back to Tennessee. Tennessee fans need to be patient with Heupel because Heupel inherited a mess, like Jeremy Pruitt inherited a mess, like Butch Jones inherited a mess.

• "Tennessee is like a stock that everyone is hoping will be a 10, but it's down to an 8.5."

# INDIVIDUAL STATS

## PASSING

| NAME | GP | Effic | Cmp | Att | Int | Pct | Yards | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| J. Guarantano | 7 | 125.4 | 103 | 166 | 4 | 62.1 | 1112 | 6 | 48 | 158.9 |
| H. Bailey | 6 | 155.5 | 48 | 68 | 2 | 70.6 | 578 | 4 | 74 | 96.3 |

## RECEIVING

| RECEIVING | GP | No. | Yards | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| J. Palmer | 10 | 33 | 475 | 14.4 | 4 | 36 | 47.5 |
| V. Jones Jr. | 10 | 22 | 280 | 12.7 | 3 | 74 | 28.0 |
| J. Hyatt | 10 | 20 | 276 | 13.8 | 2 | 48 | 27.6 |

## RUSHING

| RUSHING | GP | Att. | Gain | Loss | Net | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| E. Gray | 9 | 157 | 793 | 21 | 772 | 4.9 | 4 | 33 | 85.8 |
| T. Chandler | 10 | 100 | 463 | 7 | 456 | 4.6 | 4 | 21 | 45.6 |
| J. Small | 10 | 26 | 120 | 3 | 117 | 4.5 | 0 | 17 | 11.7 |

## DEF. LEADERS

Tackles: H. To'o To'o 76, T. Flowers 62, Q. Crouch 57
Tackles for loss: H. To'o To'o 10, K. Bennett 7.5, D. Johnson 6
Sacks: K. Bennett 4.5, D. Johnson 4.5, three tied with 2
Interceptions: B. Thompson 2, H. To'o To'o 1, A. Taylor 1, T. Jackson 1

# 247SPORTS VOLUNTEERS RECRUITING 2021

## 3 NEWCOMERS OF IMPACT

### Byron Young

One of the nation's top junior-college defensive ends, Young is the only true edge rusher in Tennessee's class after former signee Dylan Brooks was released from his National Letter of Intent. The Vols need all the pass-rushing help they can get, and Young should have every opportunity to contribute early after enrolling in January.

### Tiyon Evans

The 5-foot-11, 220-pound Evans was the No. 1 junior-college running back in the 2021 class and one of the stars of the Vols' class. The former staff signed him to provide immediate help. Evans has a clearer path to early playing time following the departures of former starters Eric Gray and Ty Chandler.

### Kaidon Salter

A top-100 prospect and Elite 11 quarterback, Salter has enough natural ability to compete for early playing time. It's more difficult to envision him starting as a true freshman after his turbulent first months on campus, including a suspension because of an off-field issue. But his strong arm and mobility could make him a factor before long.

## SLEEPER

### Andison Coby

A wide receiver from Northeast Mississippi Community College, Coby was a surprise addition to Tennessee's class during former interim coach Kevin Steele's brief tenure. The 6-2, 180-pound Coby might need some time to develop, but his speed and natural ability could help him find his way onto the field before long.

## 2022 NEEDS

First-year coach Josh Heupel inherited a roster that needs help across the board, but most of Tennessee's biggest needs are on defense. After signing only two true defensive backs in the 2021 class, the Vols will look to add a handful of players in the secondary. They also could use a large group of linemen on defense, with five senior defensive linemen set to leave after the 2021 season. The Vols also need edge rushers and linebackers to replenish their depth.

— By Ryan Callahan, GoVols247.com

## 247SPORTS COMPOSITE

| 0 | 9 | 9 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|
| ✪✪✪✪✪ | ✪✪✪✪ | ✪✪✪ | ✪✪ |

| | |
|---|---|
| Commitments | 10 |
| Average Stars | 3.42 |
| Total Stars | 65 |
| National Rank: 22 | SEC: 8 |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Trinity Bell** | TE | 6-6 | 265 | ✪✪✪ | Albertville, AL | Albertville |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 38 athlete nationally and No. 16 player in Alabama… As a senior, had 37 receptions for 472 yards and two touchdowns… Had 26 receptions for 415 yards and six touchdowns as a junior… Had 28 tackles, including six tackles for loss, and two quarterback sacks… Helped team to state playoffs. | | | | | | |
| **Cody Brown** | RB | 6-0 | 217 | ✪✪✪✪ | Lilburn, GA | Parkview |
| Ranked No. 10 running back nationally and No. 20 player in Georgia by 247Sports.com… Had more than 5,000 career rushing yards and 65 touchdowns, averaging 116 yards per game… Had 1,676 yards rushing and 20 touchdowns as a junior… Helped team to 12-2 record and state semifinals. | | | | | | |
| **Miles Campbell** | TE | 6-1 | 245 | ✪✪✪✪ | Douglasville, GA | South Paulding |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 11 tight end nationally and No. 23 player in Georgia… Had 1,385 career receiving yards, 11 touchdown receptions and five rushing touchdowns… As a senior, had 25 receptions for 232 yards and one touchdown in shortened season… Played quarterback as a freshman. | | | | | | |
| **JT Carver** | PK | 5-11 | 175 | ✪✪ | Martin | Westview |
| Rated No. 14 kicker nationally by Kohl's Kicking Service. | | | | | | |
| **Christian Charles** | DB | 6-1 | 185 | ✪✪✪ | Gainesville, GA | Chestatee |
| Ranked No. 33 player in Georgia by 247Sports.com… Dual-threat quarterback with 4,521 career passing yards and 25 touchdowns… Had 2,711 career rushing yards and 33 touchdowns… Had 2,092 yards passing and 14 touchdowns as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Jeremiah Crawford** | OL | 6-5 | 300 | ✪✪✪ | Goddard, KS | Butler Community College |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 40 junior college player and No. 3 junior college offensive tackle nationally and No. 12 junior college player in Kansas… Started 10 games as a freshman and played 2021 spring junior college season. | | | | | | |
| **KaTron Evans** | DL | 6-4 | 315 | ✪✪✪✪ | Chesapeake, VA | St. Frances Academy |
| Ranked No. 13 defensive tackle nationally and No. 7 player in Maryland by 247Sports.com… 2020 football season cancelled in Maryland… Helped team to 11-1 record and played on a defense that allowed an average 4.8 points per game as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Tiyon Evans** | RB | 5-11 | 220 | ✪✪✪✪ | Hartsville, SC | Hutchinson CC |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 3 junior college player and No. 1 junior college running back… 2020 season cancelled… As a freshman, had 538 yards rushing and nine touchdowns… Returned 16 kickoffs for 608 yards and two touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **J'Marion Gooch** | OL | 6-6 | 330 | ✪✪✪ | Gallatin | Gallatin |
| Ranked No. 67 offensive tackle nationally and No. 18 player in Tennessee by 247Sports.com… Only played two years of high school football. | | | | | | |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Kaemen Marley** | ATH | 6-2 | 215 | ✪✪✪✪ | Ramseur, NC | Eastern Randolph |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 4 athlete nationally and No. 9 player in North Carolina… 2020 season cancelled… Helped team to 10-3 record and state playoffs as a junior… Had 814 yards receiving, 396 yards rushing and 26 touchdowns… Had three interceptions. | | | | | | |
| **Chase McGrath** | PK | 6-0 | 198 | ✪✪✪ | Newport Beach, CA | Univ. of Southern California |
| Graduate transfer… Made 32 of 42 career field goals attempted with a long of 52 yards… Made 118 of 119 career points after touchdown attempts… Appeared in 30 games… As a junior, made 14 of 17 field goals attempted and 54 of 54 points after touchdown attempted. | | | | | | |
| **Amari McNeill** | DL | 6-4 | 285 | ✪✪✪ | Suwanee, GA | Peachtree Ridge |
| Helped team to state playoffs as a senior. | | | | | | |
| **Walker Merrill** | WR | 6-1 | 180 | ✪✪✪✪ | Brentwood | Brentwood |
| Ranked No. 57 wide receiver nationally and No. 9 player in Tennessee by 247Sports.com… As a senior, helped team to state championship game… Had 1,173 yards receiving and eight touchdowns… Had 62 receptions for 568 yards as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Julian Nixon** | ATH | 6-4 | 225 | ✪✪✪✪ | Roswell, GA | Centennial |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 54 wide receiver nationally and No. 28 player in Georgia… Had 82 career receptions for 1,090 yards and nine touchdowns… Scored 16 career touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **William Parker** | OL | 6-5 | 330 | ✪✪✪ | Nashville | Pearl-Cohn |
| Ranked No. 7 player and No. 38 offensive tackle nationally by 247Sports.com… Helped team to 10-2 season and state semifinals as a senior… As a junior, helped team to 14-1 record and state championship game. | | | | | | |
| **Kaidon Salter** | QB | 6-1 | 190 | ✪✪✪✪ | Cedar Hill, TX | Cedar Hill |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 46 player and No. 3 dual-threat quarterback nationally and No. 6 player in Texas… As a senior, had 1,546 yards passing and 19 touchdowns with three interceptions in eight games… Had 2,550 yards passing and 28 touchdowns as a junior… Had 616 yards rushing and 10 touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Aaron Willis** | LB | 5-11 | 225 | ✪✪✪✪ | Midlothian, VA | Life Christian Academy |
| Ranked No. 9 outside linebacker nationally and No. 5 player in Virginia by 247Sports.com… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game… Had nine tackles, one quarterback sack and one seven-yard interception return as a senior. | | | | | | |
| **Jaylen Wright** | RB | 5-11 | 200 | ✪✪✪ | Durham, NC | Southern |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 30 running back nationally… 2020 football season postponed… As a junior, had 901 yards rushing on 89 carries with five touchdowns… Helped team to 10-2 record. | | | | | | |
| **Byron Young** | OLB | 6-3 | 240 | ✪✪✪ | Hemingway, SC | Georgia Military College |
| Ranked No. 11 junior college player and No. 1 junior college weakside defensive end nationally by 247Sports.com… Had 31 tackles, including 11 tackles for loss, and seven quarterback sacks in 2019. | | | | | | |

# PLAYER PROFILE

## Young Takes Atypical Route to Rocky Top

OLB
**BYRON YOUNG**

Photo courtesy of UT Athletics

Tennessee outside linebacker Byron Young didn't take the usual path to the SEC.

In fact, it might be unchartered territory.

Young had no four-year college offers coming out of Carvers Bay High School in Hemingway, S.C. He had no star rating.

Two years removed from high school, he was working as an assistant manager at a Dollar General store in Columbus, Ga., when he saw an online flyer to try out at Georgia Military College — the junior college that offered him out of high school.

"I really love football," Young said. "I didn't want to give it up."

So in 2019, the unwanted prospect turned heads during his tryout.

"The first thing we saw was, 'Man, this guy can really run at 220 pounds,'" said GMC defensive coordinator Rob Manchester. "He's disruptive. His lateral quickness is superior. And he's really got some dog in him, too."

In his first year at GMC, Young had 31 tackles, including 11 for loss and seven sacks.

Young, now 6-3, 240, was starting to gain some college attention. But then the pandemic hit and junior college games were canceled.

Young was upset. Even though junior colleges were allowed 60 practices, he felt his dream was about to dissolve.

"I just felt like the colleges needed to see me in games to offer, not just practices," Young said.

What Young did in practice was dominate.

"His motor just never stops," said head coach Bert Williams, who has been at GMC for 23 years. "His effort is as good as anybody I think we've ever had here. And he makes Tarzan look wimpy when he sits there with his shirt off."

In a flash, Young had six offers from SEC schools. He picked Tennessee. And the 23-year-old impressed during spring practice.

Outside linebackers coach Mike Ekeler said Young made a "ton of improvement" during the spring.

"He's got unbelievable speed," Ekeler said. "The guy is extremely fast and he bends really well, so he can hit that corner and dip and rip and rub and beat them (offensive tackles) to the edge. I'm really excited about him."

Young is excited to play in the SEC.

"The transition has been great," said Young. "I am adjusting to it pretty well. I am really driven.

"I know what my mission is. I know what I want to accomplish. I know my ability and how hard I work. My Dad always told me to keep working hard and that the work will pay off because someone is watching."

For more coverage visit lindyssports.com/college-football/sec/tennessee

# BEST AND BRIGHTEST

## MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

### RB JABARI SMALL

After limited playing time last year, Small was impressive in the spring as he looks to replace UT's top two running backs, who transferred. … Small is elusive, has a burst, showed surprising power and can catch out of the backfield. … Running backs coach Jerry Mack said Small was "born to be a running back." … Was rated as a three-star prospect out of Briarcrest Christian School in Eads, Tenn.

## EMERGING STAR

### WR VELUS JONES JR.

The former three-star recruit out of the state of Alabama has shown steady progress over his previous five seasons before he decided to come back as a "super senior." … He redshirted at Southern California in 2016 but worked his way up to second-team All-Pac-12 as a return specialist in 2019 before transferring. … He is the Vols' leading returning receiver, and he had a career-high 125 receiving yards vs. Vanderbilt.

## TOP NEWCOMER

### LB BYRON YOUNG

The junior college signee was out of football for two years after high school. … Has great speed and explosive first step to beat blocking off the edge. … UT offensive linemen couldn't block him during spring ball. … Plays with great energy. … Considered a three-star recruit in the 247Sports Composite rankings for the 2021 JC class. … Other offers out of Georgia Military College included Auburn, Georgia and LSU.

# CLEMSON | TIGERS

ACC rank: 1 | Record: 10-2 | ACC record: 8-1 (2nd) | Stadium: Memorial (81,500)

**RANKING 2**

## TIGERS at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Clemson, S.C.
**COACH:** Dabo Swinney — At Clemson and overall: 140-33, 13 years
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Tony Elliott
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Brent Venables

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** 2020
**LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING:** 2005
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 15; 4 offense, 9 defense, kicker, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB D.J. Uiagalelei, RB Lyn-J Dixon, WR Justyn Ross, WR Joseph Ngata, DE Myles Murphy, DT Bryan Bresee, LB James Skalski, CB Andrew Booth Jr.

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** Despite the loss of the top pick in the NFL Draft, Clemson's passing game still looks like one of the best in the country. The receiving corps is back to the kind of depth the Tigers expect, and the defense returns nearly every productive player from last season.

**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** The running game took a step back last year and now is without the best rusher in ACC history, leaving a room full of backs who have yet to prove themselves. The defense is thin at cornerback and will need to remain healthy and productive.

**D.J. UIAGALELEI**
Photo by Josh Morgan-USA TODAY Sports

"I want to be the best out there for my team. I want to be the best in the country."

— QB D.J. Uiagalelei

## OFFENSE

Clemson has averaged more than 43 points per game three years in a row. That should not change in 2021.

Lyn-J Dixon and an unproven running back room take over for first-rounder Travis Etienne. The offensive line returns three starters, but needs to shore up run blocking and build more functional depth.

D.J. Uiagalelei has a monster arm, great size and he's one of the team's hardest workers. He threw for over 400 yards against Notre Dame last year on the road when Trevor Lawrence tested positive for COVID-19, and with more comfort in the offense, he could reach video-game numbers this season.

The receiving corps, despite losing Amari Rodgers and Cornell Powell, returns first-round NFL talent Justyn Ross, who missed all of 2020, along with veterans Joseph Ngata and Frank Ladson Jr., who were limited last year by injuries. Ajou Ajou is set to be a breakout receiver, and tight end Braden Galloway is back to lead a talented group.

Even if the running game is not quite as strong, the Tigers should stay among the premier scoring units in college football.

## DEFENSE

The Tigers lost starting linebacker Mike Jones Jr. (to LSU) and veteran defensive tackles Jordan Williams (Virginia Tech) and Nyles Pinckney (Minnesota) to the transfer portal. Cornerback Derion Kendrick was dismissed from the team in March.

Remarkably, those are the only losses off a unit that led the nation in sacks and led the ACC in total defense. One of the issues last year, though, was Clemson had too many injuries up front and not enough depth to get after the QB without constant blitzing.

The defensive line includes talented sophomores Myles Murphy and Bryan Bresee, who became stars in 2020. Xavier Thomas is back to try to prove he can be one of the best edge rushers in the country, and ends K.J. Henry, Justin Mascoll and tackle Tyler Davis are back as well.

Senior linebackers James Skalski and Baylon Spector return to anchor a unit that needs to be better in pass coverage. Trenton Simpson might be the key to making that happen, and increased pressure from the front would necessitate less blitzing.

That front seven needs to play well to take pressure off the secondary, which had too many busted plays in 2020. Still, with all four starting defensive backs returning, more consistency is needed.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Even the kicking game is well stocked. A year after making just 61 percent of his field-goal attempts, B.T. Potter connected on 18 of 23 in 2020, and punter Will Spiers is coming off a career season with a 44.0-yard average. The return game will feel the loss of Rodgers, but somebody figures to step up.

## OVERVIEW

If the defense cuts down on big plays and the offense flourishes with Uiagalelei, the Tigers should once again win the ACC and reach the CFP for the seventh consecutive season. However, the reality of Dabo Swinney's program now is that anything short of winning the national title will feel like a letdown.

## TOP NEWCOMER

**S Andrew Mukuba:** Clemson got a steal when the Austin, Texas, product chose to join the Tigers without ever seeing the campus. Now, the four-star prospect could end up seeing significant playing time at a position of need. He surprised even the coaches in the spring, and DC Brent Venables says he gives the defense flexibility with his coverage and ball skills.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **OFFENSE** | | | | | |
| QB | 5 | D.J. Uiagalelei | 6-4 | 250 | So. |
| RB | 23 | Lyn-J Dixon | 5-10 | 190 | Sr. |
| WR | 10 | Joseph Ngata | 6-3 | 220 | Jr. |
| WR | 8 | Justyn Ross | 6-3 | 205 | Jr. |
| WR | 2 | Frank Ladson Jr. | 6-3 | 205 | Jr. |
| TE | 88 | **Braden Galloway*** | **6-5** | **240** | **Sr.** |
| LT | 71 | **Jordan McFadden*** | **6-4** | **300** | **Jr.** |
| LG | 55 | **Matt Bockhorst*** | **6-4** | **315** | **Sr.** |
| C | 65 | Hunter Rayburn | 6-4 | 320 | So. |
| RG | 56 | **Will Putnam*** | **6-4** | **300** | **Jr.** |
| RT | 64 | Walker Parks | 6-5 | 295 | So. |
| **DEFENSE** | | | | | |
| DE | 98 | **Myles Murphy*** | **6-5** | **275** | **So.** |
| DT | 11 | **Bryan Bresee*** | **6-5** | **300** | **So.** |
| DT | 13 | **Tyler Davis*** | **6-2** | **300** | **Jr.** |
| DE | 3 | Xavier Thomas | 6-2 | 270 | Sr. |
| LB | 47 | **James Skalski*** | **6-0** | **240** | **Sr.** |
| LB | 10 | **Baylon Spector*** | **6-2** | **230** | **Sr.** |
| LB | 22 | Trenton Simpson | 6-3 | 225 | So. |
| CB | 23 | **Andrew Booth*** | **6-0** | **195** | **Jr.** |
| CB | 6 | **Sheridan Jones*** | **6-0** | **185** | **Jr.** |
| SS | 36 | **Lannden Zanders*** | **6-1** | **200** | **Jr.** |
| FS | 24 | **Nolan Turner*** | **6-1** | **205** | **Sr.** |
| **SPECIAL TEAMS** | | | | | |
| K | 29 | **B.T. Potter*** | **5-10** | **180** | **Sr.** |
| P | 48 | **Will Spiers*** | **6-5** | **220** | **Sr.** |

***Returning starters in Bold**

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | vs. Georgia (Charlotte, NC) |
| Sept. 11 | SOUTH CAROLINA STATE |
| Sept. 18 | GEORGIA TECH |
| Sept. 25 | at NC State |
| Oct. 2 | BOSTON COLLEGE |
| Oct. 15 | at Syracuse |
| Oct. 23 | at Pittsburgh |
| Oct. 30 | FLORIDA STATE |
| Nov. 6 | at Louisville |
| Nov. 13 | CONNECTICUT |
| Nov. 20 | WAKE FOREST |
| Nov. 27 | at South Carolina |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| W | at Wake Forest | 37-13 |
| W | THE CITADEL | 49-0 |
| W | VIRGINIA | 41-23 |
| W | MIAMI | 42-17 |
| W | at Georgia Tech | 73-7 |
| W | SYRACUSE | 47-21 |
| W | BOSTON COLLEGE | 34-28 |
| L | at Notre Dame | 40-47 |
| W | PITTSBURGH | 52-17 |
| W | at Virginia Tech | 45-10 |
| **ACC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME** | | |
| W | vs. Notre Dame | 34-10 |
| **SUGAR BOWL CFP SEMIFINAL** | | |
| L | vs. Ohio State | 28-49 |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 43.5 | T-3 |
| Rushing | 153.8 | 75 |
| Passing | 348.5 | 6 |
| Total | 502.3 | 10 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 20.2 | 18 |
| Rushing | 112.7 | 15 |
| Passing | 214.2 | 41 |
| Total | 326.8 | 15 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 8 | + 0.67 | T-22 |

# TEXAS A&M AGGIES

For more coverage of the Aggies, visit tamu.247Sports.com

**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Darrell Dickey **DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Mike Elko **STADIUM:** Kyle Field: 106,300

## JIMBO KNOWS: IT'S MORE THAN A ONE-GAME SEASON

Texas A&M coach Jimbo Fisher will remind his players until he's maroon in the face that they open the season on Sept. 4 and must play five games through Oct. 2. And then a bunch more after that.

Still, he knows that Aggies everywhere — including his players — have one date on the calendar circled in red.

"All I can say is," said defensive end DeMarvin Leal, "I can't wait until the Bama game."

Oh, that one: That would be Oct. 9 at Kyle Field.

Lack of confidence is not an issue for the Aggies, who ended No. 4 in the Associated Press poll last season for their highest final ranking since they won the national championship.

Eighty-two years ago, Homer Norton coached the Aggies to No. 1.

"We have a standard in this program now that we want to be the No. 1 team in the nation," defensive tackle Jayden Peevy said. "We're going to practice like that and we're going to play like that. Every day we're coming out with the mindset to be the No. 1 team."

Now, the mission for A&M is to make its first College Football Playoff, after narrowly missing the four-team shindig in 2020. Fisher is entering his fourth season at A&M; in his fourth season at Florida State in 2013 he won a national title.

"We're changing the culture here, and they see that," A&M receiver Ainias Smith said. "Jimbo and this team, we have definitely taken this place to a whole (new) level, and we're trying to take it to even bigger and greater steps. We're on the way."

A big reason for the Aggies' bluster stems from nine returning starters on defense, including three key seniors who took advantage of the NCAA granting a blanket year of eligibility due to the coronavirus pandemic: Peevy, cornerback Myles Jones and linebacker Aaron Hansford.

"We treated the first day of (spring practice) like it was Year 4, instead of the first day of camp," Peevy said. "It's a winning mentality on this team now, that's the main thing that has stood out to me."

The Aggies defeated North Carolina 41-27 in the Orange Bowl, stamping an exclamation mark on an eight-game win streak and a 9-1 finish.

Fisher has been envisioning this since Dec. 1, 2017, when the megadeal lured him from Florida State.

"If you can't see it, it's not going to happen," Fisher said. "The potential was there, and you live in vision or you live in circumstance.

"We try to live in vision, and if you can't see things in the future and put yourself there and know what it takes to get there and understand the kind of talent that you have, you're never going to get there."

## OFFENSE

The Aggies must replace four starters from a solid offensive line and replace a four-year starter at quarterback, but they don't seem cowed by that challenge.

All-American Kenyon Green is shifting from left guard to left tackle and said he's urged the newcomers around him to enjoy the overall experience.

"You don't want to come out dreading the game," he said. "That's the most important thing, have fun with it."

The Aggies expect to have loads of fun toting the ball, possessing one of the nation's top one-two punches at running back in Isaiah Spiller and Devon Achane. While Spiller handled most of the grunt work during the season (1,036 yards, 5.5-yard avg.), Achane earned Orange Bowl MVP honors after rushing for 140 yards and two touchdowns on just a dozen carries.

They should make things simpler for the new quarterback (replacing Kellen Mond), whether it is Haynes King or Zach Calzada.

King served as Mond's primary backup in 2020 and appears to hold a slight lead on Calzada entering fall camp. King runs the 40-yard dash in 4.4 seconds, but Calzada owns the best arm of any A&M quarterback in memory.

The versatile Ainias Smith lined up as tailback and split out as a receiver last year, and after leading the team in receiving (43

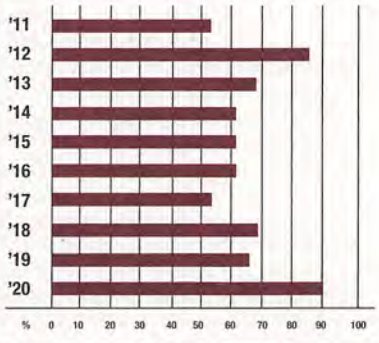
## SCHEDULE

| Date | Opponent | '20 Record |
|---|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | KENT STATE | 3-1 |
| Sept. 11 | at Colorado | 4-2 |
| Sept. 18 | NEW MEXICO | 2-5 |
| Sept. 25 | vs. Arkansas (Arlington, TX) | 3-7 |
| Oct. 2 | MISSISSIPPI STATE | 4-7 |
| Oct. 9 | ALABAMA | 13-0 |
| Oct. 16 | at Missouri | 5-5 |
| Oct. 23 | SOUTH CAROLINA | 2-8 |
| Nov. 6 | AUBURN | 6-5 |
| Nov. 13 | at Ole Miss | 5-5 |
| Nov. 20 | PRAIRIE VIEW A&M | |
| Nov. 27 | at LSU | 5-5 |

## RESULTS

| 9-1, 8-1 | | |
|---|---|---|
| W | VANDERBILT | 17-12 |
| L | at Alabama | 24-52 |
| W | FLORIDA | 41-38 |
| W | at Mississippi State | 28-14 |
| W | ARKANSAS | 42-31 |
| W | at South Carolina | 48-3 |
| W | LSU | 20-7 |
| W | at Auburn | 31-20 |
| W | at Tennessee | 34-13 |
| | **ORANGE BOWL** | |
| W | vs. North Carolina | 41-27 |

## 10-YEAR WINNING TREND



## AT A GLANCE

**LOCATION:** College Station, Texas

**2020:** 9-1 overall, 8-1 SEC (2nd, West)

**COACH:** Jimbo Fisher — At Texas A&M: 26-10, 3 years; overall: 109-33, 11 years

**RETURNING STARTERS:** 17, 6 offense, 9 defense, kicker, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:**
RB Isaiah Spiller, RB Devon Achane, WR Demond Demas, TE Jalen Wydermyer, DL DeMarvin Leal, LB Aaron Hansford, CB Jaylon Jones, S Demani Richardson

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:**
The defense is one of A&M's most experienced ever, considering the Aggies return four double-senior starters who took advantage of the NCAA's bonus year. A&M led the SEC last season in total defense, finished ninth nationally, and loses only two starters.

**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:**
The Aggies must replace four starters from one of the nation's top offensive lines, and are seeking a starting quarterback for the first time in the Jimbo Fisher era. In 2018 he inherited returning starter Kellen Mond. Now, potential Mond replacements Haynes King and Zach Calzada own zero college starts between them.

**KEY LOSSES:**
QB Kellen Mond, OT Dan Moore, C Ryan McCollum, DT Bobby Brown, LB Buddy Johnson

**OVERVIEW:**
Expectations are higher than at any time since Fisher arrived from Florida State in December 2017. A&M's schedule sets up as favorably, with five winnable games leading to the Oct. 9 date with Alabama at Kyle Field.

**KEY NUMBER:**
**8** The number of consecutive losses to Alabama since the Aggies upset the Crimson Tide in their inaugural year in the SEC in 2012.

DL
DeMarvin
LEAL

Photo by Steve Beyer

LT

**Kenyon Green**

Photo by Steve Beyer

## SCOUTING REPORT: Offense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | Haynes King | Fr. | Polished passer who also runs sub-4.5 in 40. | Zach Calzada, So. |
| **RB** | **Isaiah Spiller*** | Jr. | Possesses a rare combo of speed and power. | Devon Achane, So. |
| **WR** | **Ainias Smith*** | Jr. | Should be the Aggies' Mr. Everything. | **Chase Lane, So.*** |
| WR | Demond Demas | Fr. | Freak athlete needing to gain maturity (and weight). | Jalen Preston, Jr. |
| WR | Caleb Chapman | Jr. | Excelled early in 2020 before torn ACL. | **Hezekiah Jones, Sr.*** |
| **TE** | **Jalen Wydermyer*** | Jr. | A reliable tall target across the middle. | Baylor Cupp, So. |
| **LT** | **Kenyon Green*** | Jr. | Aggies' lone All-American in 2020. | Blake Trainor, So. |
| LG | Aki Ogunbiyi | Fr. | Quick learner in Fisher's complex system. | Smart Chibuzo, Fr. |
| C | Luke Matthews | Jr. | Taking after Hall of Famer dad. | Bryce Foster, Fr. |
| RG | Layden Robinson | So. | Mauler who can toss around defenders. | Josh Bankhead, Fr. |
| RT | Jahmir Johnson | Sr. | Transfer started 17 games at Tennessee. | Matthew Wykoff, Fr. |
| **PK** | **Seth Small*** | Sr. | 11 of 13 last season but no attempts from 50-plus. | Caden Davis, So. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

## SCOUTING REPORT: Defense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **DE** | **DeMarvin Leal*** | Jr. | Future All-American, defense's top player. | Braedon Mowry, Fr. |
| **DT** | **Jayden Peevy*** | Sr. | Height (6-6) causes problems for opposing QBs. | Dallas Walker, Fr. |
| DT | McKinnley Jackson | So. | Mountain of a man in the middle. | Isaiah Raikes, So. |
| **DE** | **Tyree Johnson*** | Sr. | Quietly consistent force in rushing passer. | Micheal Clemons, Sr. |
| LB | Andre White Jr. | Jr. | Interception and 1.5 sacks in limited 2020 role. | Edgerrin Cooper, Fr. |
| **LB** | **Aaron Hansford*** | Sr. | Ultimate team player began career as WR. | Tarian Lee, So. |
| **NB** | **Erick Young*** | Jr. | Only played in seven of 10 games because of injury. | Josh Moten, Fr. |
| **CB** | **Myles Jones*** | Sr. | Surprise returnee for "bonus" senior season. | Brian George, Sr. |
| **CB** | **Jaylon Jones*** | So. | Future first-round draft selection can fly. | Elijah Blades, Sr. |
| **SS** | **Demani Richardson*** | Jr. | Bit of a sophomore slump on the big-play front. | Keldrick Carper, Sr. |
| **FS** | **Leon O'Neal*** | Jr. | Talkative playmaker kept chatter in check in 2020. | Brian Williams, Jr. |
| **P** | **Nik Constantinou*** | So. | Decent but not overpowering leg at Punter U. | Alan Guerrieri, So. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

catches, 564 yards, 6 TDs), he spent the spring at wideout. Chase Lane returns, but several receivers left via the transfer portal so the Aggies are looking for a breakout year from Demond Demas, a five-star recruit in 2020.

Demas played sparingly in 2020 and needs to pack some pounds on his 6-3, 180-pound frame to withstand SEC defenses. Demas encountered some off-field problems in March but worked his way back into spring drills and Fisher labeled his April performance as "outstanding … he really came a long way."

Tight end Jalen Wydermyer (78 catches in two seasons) is a consistent threat across the middle, and former five-star prospect Baylor Cupp is finally healthy at the position after missing his first two seasons because of injuries.

As for that nearly brand-new offensive line led by Green, Fisher said, "It's a group that can move people — it's a really good group, but we have to get that continuity going."

Aki Ogunbiyi should hold down left guard, while the center is Luke Matthews (son of Pro Football Hall of Famer Bruce Matthews). Layden Robinson pencils in at right guard, while right tackle will be occupied by either Blake Trainor or incoming transfer Jahmir Johnson of Tennessee.

Johnson started 17 games over his career with the Volunteers, and Fisher said he considered Tennessee's offensive line last season second only to Alabama's among A&M opponents.

Fisher added that Robinson is "as physical a guy as I may have coached in 30 years on the line of scrimmage. It looks like a cartoon sometimes when he throws guys."

## DEFENSE

Defensive coordinator Mike Elko is so popular with his players that three starters and two part-time starters who were seniors last season returned for the NCAA's pandemic bonus year.

Fisher said while the five defenders might have been drafted in the NFL, "They can grow … those guys made mature decisions."

Recruiting defensive backs has been a Fisher strength since his arrival in College Station, and it's paying off with standouts like cornerback Jaylon Jones and safety Demani Richardson joining veterans Myles Jones and Leon O'Neal in the secondary.

A&M should be stout along the defensive line, anchored by future All-American DeMarvin Leal. Notably, Jayden Peevy and Tyree Johnson also return up front from the No. 2 rushing defense in the country. Watch for impressive sophomore McKinnley Jackson (and perhaps five-star defensive tackle Shamar Turner) to help fill for fourth-round draft pick Bobby Brown III, who was a first-team All-SEC selection last year.

## TOP 5 NFL PROSPECTS

**1. DeMarvin Leal** — DT, 6-4, 290, 4.89, Jr.

Oozing with upside, Leal is only beginning to scratch the surface of his raw potential. He was utilized in numerous roles in 2020, while registering 37 tackles, 2.5 sacks, three passes defended and one interception. Leal is one of the most explosive prospects coming off the edge and is patient in his run defense, willing to take on multiple blockers to cut off lanes.

The question about Leal is not his talent — he should be a first-round pick — but rather his fit. Some scouts will view the junior as an interior player, while other evaluators will see his value playing on the outside. He has a long frame and wingspan that allows him to back-pedal and drop into coverage to provide exotic looks. In a 4-3 defense, he could also bump inside to provide some pass rush. Leal sheds blockers with a strong array of pass moves, owns tremendous footwork and has impressive speed, which should make him one of the first defensive linemen called in the 2022 NFL Draft.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2. Jalen Wydermyer** | TE | 6-5 | 255 | 4.78 | Jr. |
| **3. Isaiah Spiller** | RB | 6-1 | 225 | 4.54 | Jr. |
| **4. Kenyon Green** | OL | 6-4 | 325 | 5.34 | Jr. |
| **5. Ainias Smith** | RB/WR | 5-10 | 190 | 4.42 | Jr. |

— Ric Serritella, NFL Draft Bible

**Ainias Smith**
Photo by Steve Beyer

Linebacker is the biggest question, after team leader Buddy Johnson was a fourth-round draft pick, but steady Aaron Hansford is back and Fisher repeatedly pointed to the play of Edgerrin Cooper, Andre White and Antonio Doyle in the spring as to why fans should be excited about the future at linebacker.

Elko, as he's done the past couple of years, turned down offers to be a head coach at less prominent programs. "Everyone has ambitions for their future," he said, "but those things are just kind of on the backburner."

Also on the backburner is giving this defense a nickname, or accepting comparisons to the legendary A&M "Wrecking Crew."

"That's not just a name we want to be throwing around lightly around here," Elko said. "We know how important it is to people."

The Wrecking Crew's previous hurrah was 23 years ago — when linebacker Dat Nguyen led the Aggies to their last conference championship (1998 while still in the Big 12). Elko's current crew is about the closest facsimile since.

The Aggies in 2020 led the SEC in total defense (allowing 317.3 yards per game) and begrudged opponents just five touchdowns over their last four regular-season games.

Now it's about staying power and championships.

"If we can get to the point where over the course of years we're playing at a very high level and we're helping this team win championships," Elko said, "... that's what 'Wrecking Crew' means to me."

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Starting kicker Seth Small (11 of 13 on field goal attempts in 2020) is back, and long-range kicker Caden Davis drilled field goals of 55 and 51 yards in the spring game. Fisher said the duo works well together, with Small handling the shorter kicks.

"Seth is awesome at what he does, but Caden having that ability to hit those long field goals — you don't know when you're going to need one, and he's a real weapon," Fisher said.

Returning punter Nik Constantinou averaged a serviceable 40.5 yards on 36 punts, and Devon Achane could become one of the most electric return men in the country.

## SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

Fisher doesn't care to hear this, considering the Aggies play in what is typically the toughest division in college football, but the Aggies' schedule is its most navigable in years. It's long seemed a given that if A&M finally wins an SEC West title, it will occur in an odd-numbered year, because that's when Alabama and Auburn visit Kyle Field.

A&M should be favored in its first five games leading to its ballyhooed showdown against the Crimson Tide on Oct. 9 at Kyle Field.

But even should the Aggies somehow get through their first 11 games unscathed, a big test would still be waiting in Baton Rouge on Nov. 27 to close out the regular season.

— Brent Zwerneman

### 2018 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 36.0 | 19 |
| Rushing | 219.0 | 21 |
| Passing | 252.6 | 43 |
| Total | 471.6 | 15 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 25.3 | 47 |
| Rushing | 95.2 | 3 |
| Passing | 253.2 | 98 |
| Total | 348.4 | 32 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 7 | - 0.54 | T-109 |

### 2019 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 29.5 | 62 |
| Rushing | 159.1 | T-68 |
| Passing | 235.4 | 64 |
| Total | 394.5 | 72 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 22.5 | T-37 |
| Rushing | 130.7 | 30 |
| Passing | 209.5 | 41 |
| Total | 340.2 | 29 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 6 | - 0.46 | T-100 |

### 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 32.6 | 37 |
| Rushing | 205.1 | 27 |
| Passing | 234.1 | 59 |
| Total | 439.2 | 33 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 21.7 | 28 |
| Rushing | 92.0 | 2 |
| Passing | 225.3 | 56 |
| Total | 317.3 | 9 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 6 | + 0.60 | 25 |

# NOTEBOOK

Texas A&M fan **Tonya Spell** had no trouble asking **Jimbo Fisher** the key question at a Houston Touchdown Club event in the spring: Outside of Alabama icon **Nick Saban** retiring, what is it going to take for the Aggies to beat the Crimson Tide?

"We're going to beat his ass even when he's there," Fisher quickly responded to a roar from the crowd.

ESPN commentator **Paul Finebaum** labeled Fisher's retort, "The shot heard 'round the college football world."

Relayed Fisher's comment, a bemused Saban shot back with two words: "In golf?"

Alabama owns an eight-game win streak against A&M, and Saban has defeated Fisher by an average of 23 points in their three meetings with Fisher's Aggies. Saban is 23-0 against his former assistants, including 4-0 overall against Fisher.

• Fisher's youngest son, **Ethan**, turned 16 in the spring, and Ethan's ability to compete in and simply enjoy sports brought tears of joy to his father's eyes. "The word 'hope' is the greatest word in our vocabulary," Jimbo said.

Ten years ago doctors diagnosed Ethan with Fanconi anemia, a rare blood disease that "prevents your bone marrow from making enough new blood cells for your body to work normally," according to the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.

About 30 children a year are born in the United States with the disease, or about one in 130,000, according to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. A quarter century ago, only one in seven Fanconi Anemia patients survived a donor bone marrow transplant. Now it's "greater than 90 percent," said Ethan's doctor, **Margaret MacMillan**.

One reason for that is the Kidz1stFund established by the Fisher family a decade ago, which has raised more than $11 million.

• Fisher could not contain his enthusiasm about on-campus recruiting cranking back up this summer while giving a speech to A&M fans on Cinco de Mayo (May 5). "(It's) like Mardi Gras and Cinco De Mayo all in one thing, with all the (recruits) coming back to campus," an ecstatic Fisher said. "It's been a year and a half since we've had anyone on campus."

## OPPOSING COACHES VIEW

• "Jimbo Fisher is one of the top four or five quarterback developers in the country. (Quarterback) Kellen Mond had a ceiling on him talent-wise, but Jimbo did a great job with Mond. …

• "Jimbo's got a great offensive mind. He could be a coach that beats Nick Saban because Jimbo knows (Saban's) defense. And Jimbo's got the best defensive coordinator (Mike Elko) in the league, schematically and adjustment wise. He coaches his front better than anybody in the league and they play the best technically. Elko is to A&M what Dave Aranda was to LSU. A&M always plays good defense; they don't ever have a bad day. …

• "It will be hard for A&M to match last year's 9-1 record when you lose your quarterback, but with that being said, the West has only one team that is a legit top 10 team: Alabama. That gives him a chance."

# AGGIES SPRING ROSTER

| Quarterbacks | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 31 Reinard Britz | QB | 6-3 | 190 | Jr. | Conroe |
| 10 Zach Calzada | QB | 6-4 | 200 | So. | Sugar Hill, GA |
| 18 Zach Daniel | QB | 6-0 | 180 | So. | Houston |
| 13 Haynes King | QB | 6-3 | 200 | Fr. | Longview |
| 22 Cooper McCollum | QB | 6-2 | 195 | Fr. | Wimberley |
| 17 Eli Stowers | QB | 6-4 | 215 | Fr. | Corinth |

| Running Backs | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 Devon Achane | RB | 5-9 | 185 | So. | Missouri City |
| 20 Connor Cook | RB | 6-0 | 200 | So. | Salado |
| 24 Earnest Crownover | RB | 6-3 | 215 | So. | Grandview |
| 21 Darvon Hubbard | RB | 6-0 | 210 | Fr. | Akron, Ohio |
| 25 Deondre Jackson | RB | 5-11 | 225 | Fr. | Stone Mountain, GA |
| 45 Joe Mawad | RB | 6-2 | 260 | Sr. | Westbury, NY |
| 35 Bladen Reaves | RB | 5-11 | 185 | So. | Bryan |
| 28 Isaiah Spiller | RB | 6-1 | 225 | Jr. | Spring |

| Wide Receivers | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 19 Shadrach Banks | WR | 6-1 | 230 | Fr. | Houston |
| 14 Camron Buckley | WR | 6-2 | 190 | Sr. | Cedar Hill |
| 29 Daniel Bushland | WR | 6-1 | 190 | Jr. | Austin |
| 83 Ryan Campbell | WR | 6-2 | 180 | So. | New Orleans, LA |
| 81 Caleb Chapman | WR | 6-5 | 195 | Jr. | Friendswood |
| 1 Demond Demas | WR | 6-3 | 180 | Fr. | Tomball |
| 26 Jacob Groff | WR | 6-2 | 210 | Sr. | San Antonio |
| 82 Hayden Haas | WR | 6-1 | 195 | So. | Seguin |
| 16 Kenyon Jackson | WR | 6-6 | 200 | So. | Loganville, GA |
| 9 Hezekiah Jones | WR | 6-0 | 180 | Sr. | Stafford |
| 2 Chase Lane | WR | 6-0 | 190 | So. | Houston |
| 30 Reese Mason | WR | 6-1 | 205 | Jr. | Magnolia |
| 7 Moose Muhammad III | WR | 6-1 | 195 | Fr. | Charlotte, NC |
| 5 Jalen Preston | WR | 6-2 | 215 | Jr. | Manvel |
| 3 Devin Price | WR | 6-3 | 205 | So. | College Station |
| 0 Ainias Smith | WR | 5-10 | 190 | Jr. | Missouri City |

| Tight Ends | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 88 Baylor Cupp | TE | 6-7 | 240 | So. | Brock |
| 84 William Kuehnle | TE | 6-5 | 240 | Jr. | Spring |
| 89 Justin Mellenbruch | TE | 6-1 | 230 | Sr. | Austin |
| 80 Tyler Ondrusek | TE | 6-7 | 210 | Jr. | Houston |
| 11 Blake Smith | TE | 6-4 | 265 | Fr. | Southlake |
| 42 Max Wright | TE | 6-4 | 255 | Jr. | Katy |
| 85 Jalen Wydermyer | TE | 6-5 | 255 | Jr. | Dickinson |

| Offensive Lineman | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 70 Josh Bankhead | OL | 6-5 | 330 | Fr. | The Woodlands |
| 52 Smart Chibuzo | OL | 6-4 | 320 | Fr. | Fresno |
| 67 Galen Gallagher | OL | 6-4 | 300 | Jr. | Orange Grove |
| 55 Kenyon Green | OL | 6-4 | 325 | Jr. | Humble |
| 65 Derick Hunter Jr. | OL | 6-4 | 300 | So. | Fort Myers, FL |
| 63 Braeden Kobza | OL | 6-0 | 280 | So. | Tomball |
| 75 Luke Matthews | OL | 6-4 | 320 | Jr. | Missouri City |
| 74 Aki Ogunbiyi | OL | 6-4 | 305 | Fr. | Houston |
| 71 Grayson Reed | OL | 6-5 | 310 | Sr. | Cypress |
| 64 Layden Robinson | OL | 6-4 | 330 | So. | Manvel |
| 57 John Sabra | OL | 6-2 | 330 | So. | Magnolia |
| 53 Blake Trainor | OL | 6-7 | 330 | So. | Hallsville |
| 77 Matthew Wykoff | OL | 6-6 | 325 | Fr. | Magnolia |
| 60 Trey Zuhn III | OL | 6-6 | 310 | Fr. | Fort Collins, CO |

| Defensive Lineman | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 30 Tunmise Adeleye | DL | 6-4 | 295 | Fr. | Katy |
| 91 Marcus Burris Jr. | DL | 6-4 | 285 | Fr. | Texarkana |
| 2 Micheal Clemons | DL | 6-5 | 270 | Sr. | Garland |
| 10 Fadil Diggs | DL | 6-5 | 250 | Fr. | East Camden, NJ |
| 37 Jahzion Harris | DL | 6-4 | 230 | Fr. | Staten Island, NY |
| 18 Donell Harris, Jr. | DL | 6-3 | 220 | Fr. | Liberty City, FL |
| 35 McKinnley Jackson | DL | 6-2 | 335 | So. | Lucedale, MS |
| 94 Jordan Jefferson | DL | 6-0 | 300 | Fr. | Navasota |
| 90 Elijah Jeudy | DL | 6-3 | 275 | Fr. | Philadelphia, PA |
| 99 Jordan Johnson | DL | 6-1 | 290 | So. | Dallas |
| 3 Tyree Johnson | DL | 6-4 | 240 | Sr. | Washington, DC |
| 6 Adarious Jones | DL | 6-4 | 315 | So. | Virginia Beach, VA |
| 8 DeMarvin Leal | DL | 6-4 | 290 | Jr. | San Antonio |
| 46 Braedon Mowry | DL | 6-4 | 240 | Fr. | Katy |
| 41 R.J. Orebo | DL | 6-7 | 275 | So. | Dayton |
| 92 Jayden Peevy | DL | 6-6 | 310 | Sr. | Bellaire |
| 97 Travis Pepin | DL | 6-1 | 250 | Jr. | Rusk |
| 96 Grant Perry | DL | 6-3 | 240 | Fr. | Houston |
| 34 Isaiah Raikes | DL | 6-1 | 330 | So. | Woodbury, NJ |
| 98 Esteban Valero | DL | 5-9 | 265 | So. | Dallas |
| 93 Dallas Walker IV | DL | 6-3 | 335 | Fr. | Nashville, TN |

| Linebackers | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 36 Ke'Shun Brown | LB | 6-1 | 230 | So. | Montgomery, AL |
| 45 Edgerrin Cooper | LB | 6-3 | 215 | Fr. | Covington, LA |
| 22 Antonio Doyle, Jr. | LB | 6-3 | 250 | So. | St. Louis, MO |
| 33 Aaron Hansford | LB | 6-3 | 240 | Sr. | Washington, DC |
| 53 Houston Hummel | LB | 6-4 | 245 | Fr. | Dallas |
| 23 Tarian Lee Jr. | LB | 6-2 | 245 | So. | Tallahassee, FL |
| 52 Andrew Merrick | LB | 6-2 | 230 | Fr. | Dallas |
| 24 Chris Russell Jr. | LB | 6-2 | 240 | Jr. | Dyersburg, TN |
| 32 Andre White Jr. | LB | 6-3 | 225 | Jr. | Harrisburg, PA |

| Defensive Backs | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 19 Elijah Blades | DB | 6-2 | 180 | Sr. | Pasadena, CA |
| 14 Keldrick Carper | DB | 6-2 | 195 | Sr. | Plain Dealing, LA |
| 29 Tyreek Chappell | DB | 5-11 | 180 | Fr. | Philadelphia, PA |
| 81 Kyle Fitzgerald | DB | 6-4 | 190 | Jr. | San Antonio |
| 42 Cade Garcia | DB | 5-8 | 185 | Jr. | Fort Worth |
| 16 Brian George | DB | 6-2 | 190 | Sr. | South Bay, FL |
| 28 Deuce Harmon | DB | 5-10 | 190 | Fr. | Corinth |
| 40 Avery Hughes | DB | 6-0 | 180 | Fr. | Sugar Land |
| 27 Antonio Johnson | DB | 6-3 | 195 | So. | East St. Louis, IL |
| 17 Jaylon Jones | DB | 6-2 | 205 | So. | Cibolo |
| 0 Myles Jones | DB | 6-4 | 185 | Sr. | Magnolia |
| 39 Samuel Mathews | DB | 6-3 | 215 | Jr. | League City |
| 39 Caleb Merrell | DB | 6-1 | 195 | So. | Bryan |
| 7 Devin Morris | DB | 6-1 | 205 | Sr. | Caldwell |
| 21 Josh Moten | DB | 6-0 | 165 | Fr. | Waldorf, MD |
| 9 Leon O'Neal Jr. | DB | 6-1 | 210 | Sr. | Cypress |
| 83 Chase Petter | DB | 5-8 | 185 | So. | Argyle |
| 49 Dion Pinkard | DB | 5-10 | 190 | So. | The Woodlands |
| 26 Demani Richardson | DB | 6-1 | 210 | Jr. | Waxahachie |
| 80 Will Smoot | DB | 5-10 | 180 | So. | Houston |
| 82 Heng Taing | DB | 5-9 | 155 | Fr. | Mesquite |
| 13 Brian Williams | DB | 6-1 | 215 | Jr. | Dallas |
| 4 Erick Young | DB | 6-1 | 205 | Jr. | Richmond |
| 43 Alex Zettler | DB | 6-0 | 205 | Jr. | West Jordan, UT |

| Specialist | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 94 Drake Bhatia | PK | 5-7 | 155 | Fr. | Houston |
| 98 Randy Bond | PK | 5-10 | 175 | Fr. | Plano |
| 40 Connor Choate | DS | 6-1 | 200 | Jr. | Coppell |
| 95 Nik Constantinou | P | 6-3 | 220 | So. | Melbourne, AUS |
| 36 Caden Davis | PK | 6-3 | 200 | So. | Coppell |
| 48 Jacob Graham | DS | 5-11 | 206 | Fr. | Houston |
| 38 Alan Guerrieri | P/K | 6-0 | 190 | So. | College Station |
| 47 Seth Small | PK | 5-11 | 200 | Sr. | Katy |
| 50 Garrett Townsend | DS | 5-11 | 225 | So. | Houston |

# INDIVIDUAL STATS

## PASSING

| NAME | GP | Effic | Cmp | Att | Int | Pct | Yards | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K. Mond | 10 | 146.9 | 188 | 297 | 3 | 63.3 | 2282 | 19 | 54 | 228.2 |
| H. King | 2 | 206.4 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 50.0 | 59 | 1 | 42 | 29.5 |

## RECEIVING

| RECEIVING | GP | No. | Yards | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A. Smith | 10 | 43 | 564 | 13.1 | 6 | 54 | 56.4 |
| J. Wydermyer | 10 | 46 | 506 | 11.0 | 6 | 32 | 50.6 |
| C. Lane | 10 | 29 | 409 | 14.1 | 2 | 51 | 40.9 |

## RUSHING

| RUSHING | GP | Att. | Gain | Loss | Net | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I. Spiller | 10 | 188 | 1083 | 47 | 1036 | 5.5 | 9 | 57 | 103.6 |
| D. Achane | 8 | 43 | 366 | 2 | 364 | 8.5 | 4 | 76 | 45.5 |
| K. Mond | 10 | 74 | 356 | 62 | 294 | 4.0 | 4 | 26 | 29.4 |

## DEF. LEADERS

Tackles: B Johnson 86, A. Hansford 49, L. O'Neal Jr. 48
Tackles for loss: B. Johnson 8.5, B. Brown III 7.5, two tied with 7
Sacks: B. Brown III 5.5, B. Johnson 4, T. Johnson 4, M. Clemons 4
Interceptions: L. O'Neal Jr. 2, eight tied with 1

# 247SPORTS AGGIES RECRUITING 2021

## 3 NEWCOMERS OF IMPACT

### Shemar Turner

Texas A&M loaded up on the defensive line in 2021, and Turner represented a big key in that. The five-star defender is a disruptive presence that has the ability to play both inside and outside on the defensive line. He has already drawn comparisons to current A&M standout DeMarvin Leal.

### LJ Johnson

LJ Johnson is another significant addition to a deep A&M running back room. The top-50 prospect has the ability to run between the tackles or be a threat as a receiver as well. With a number of options available, the Aggies will likely look to share carries and Johnson should factor into that mix.

### Deuce Harmon

Texas A&M will have both starters back at corner, but Deuce Harmon certainly has a chance to make an impact right away as an early enrollee. The four-star cornerback is coming off a huge senior year and has excellent ball skills to go along with an explosive first step.

## SLEEPER

### Tyreek Chappell

While Tyreek Chappell missed his senior year due to the pandemic, he used that time to graduate early and be ready for spring ball. Chappell surrendered just two catches on 41 targets as a junior and is a long, athletic corner with the potential to develop into a really good player.

## 2022 NEEDS

After not signing any true linebackers during the 2021 cycle, Texas A&M plans to place a heavy emphasis on that position during the 2022 cycle. It also needs to continue to add to the receiver room and will likely sign a big class at that position. The Aggies have also made the trenches a major focus under Jimbo Fisher, and it's reasonable to expect that will be a key priority moving forward as well.

— By Andrew Hattersley, GigEm247.com

## 247SPORTS COMPOSITE

| 5★ | 4★ | 3★ | 2★ |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 14 | 10 | 0 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Committments | 25 |
| Average Stars | 3.64 |
| Total Stars | 91 |
| National Rank: 7 | SEC: 4 |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Tunmise Adeleye** | DL | 6-4 | 245 | ★★★★ | Katy | Tompkins |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 84 player and No. 6 strongside defensive end nationally and No. 13 player in Texas… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game. | | | | | | |
| **Shadrach Banks** | WR | 6-1 | 230 | ★★★★ | Houston | North Shore |
| Ranked No. 25 wide receiver nationally and No. 29 player in Texas by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had 66 receptions for 1,292 yards and 13 touchdowns … Had 431 yards rushing and eight touchdowns … Had 60 receptions for 1,300 yards and 17 touchdowns as a sophomore… Invited to play in All-American Bowl. | | | | | | |
| **Yulkeith Brown** | ATH | 5-10 | 175 | ★★★ | Miami, FL | Miami Central |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 25 athlete nationally and No. 46 player in Florida … Had 883 yards rushing and 13 touchdowns as a senior. | | | | | | |
| **Marcus Burris** | DL | 6-4 | 285 | ★★★★ | Texarkana | Pleasant Grove |
| Ranked No. 10 strongside defensive end nationally and No. 22 player in Texas by 247Sports.com … As a junior, had 92 tackles, including 20 tackles for loss, 13 quarterback sacks, one fumble caused and one interception … All-State… Missed senior season due to injury. | | | | | | |
| **Tyreek Chappell** | DB | 5-11 | 180 | ★★★ | Philadelphia, PA | Northeast |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 34 cornerback nationally and No. 15 player in Pennsylvania … Had 13 tackles, three interceptions, and two passes broken up as a senior. | | | | | | |
| **Demetrious Crownover** | TE | 6-6 | 275 | ★★★ | Grandview | Grandview |
| Ranked No. 63 player in Texas by 247Sports.com… Two-time All-District tight end and defensive end… Helped team to state championship as a sophomore. | | | | | | |
| **Amari Daniels** | RB | 5-9 | 195 | ★★★ | Miami, FL | Miami Central |
| Ranked No. 7 all-purpose back nationally and No. 36 player in Florida by 247Sports.com … As a senior, had 890 yards rushing and seven touchdowns… Had 883 yards rushing and 13 touchdowns as a junior… Helped team to state championship. | | | | | | |
| **Kendal Daniels** | DB | 6-4 | 190 | ★★★★ | Okmulgee, OK | Beggs |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 99 player and No. 4 safety nationally and No. 1 player in Oklahoma … Had 120 tackles, including 14 tackles for loss, six quarterback sacks, and four interceptions in 2020… As a junior, had 117 tackles and six interceptions. | | | | | | |
| **Reuben (Deuce) Fatheree, II** | OL | 6-8 | 305 | ★★★★ | Richmond | Foster |
| Ranked No. 18 offensive tackle nationally and No. 18 player in Texas by 247Sports.com… Three-time All-District. | | | | | | |
| **Bryce Foster** | OL | 6-5 | 330 | ★★★★ | Katy | Taylor |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 6 offensive guard nationally and No. 19 player in Texas… Ranked No. 5 player in Texas by TexAgs. | | | | | | |
| **Fernando Garza** | TE | 6-5 | 244 | ★★★ | Katy | Katy |
| Ranked No. 41 tight end nationally by 247Sports.com… Rated No. 84 player in Texas by TexAgs… Injured during senior season… Pitcher for baseball team. | | | | | | |
| **Jardin Gilbert** | DB | 6-1 | 175 | ★★★★ | White Castle, LA | University Lab |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 11 safety nationally and No. 9 player in Louisiana. | | | | | | |
| **Deuce Harmon** | DB | 5-10 | 190 | ★★★★ | Corinth | Denton Guyer |
| Ranked No. 16 cornerback nationally and No. 33 player in Texas by 247Sports.com… Had 15 tackles and four interceptions as a senior before season-ending back injury… As a junior, had 46 tackles and two interceptions… Two-time All-District. | | | | | | |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Jahzion Harris** | DL | 6-4 | 230 | ★★★ | Staten Island, NY | Erasmus Hall |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 25 weakside defensive end nationally and No. 2 player in New York… Did not play as a senior due to COVID. | | | | | | |
| **Elijah Jeudy** | DL | 6-3 | 275 | ★★★★ | Philadelphia, PA | Northeast |
| Ranked No. 15 weakside defensive end and No. 201 player nationally and No. 9 player in Pennsylvania by 247Sports.com… Invited to All-American Bowl. | | | | | | |
| **LJ Johnson, Jr.** | RB | 5-10 | 205 | ★★★★ | Cypress | Cy-Fair |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 45 player and No. 3 running back nationally and No. 8 player in Texas… Invited to U.S. Army All-American Game… Scored 82 offensive touchdowns in three seasons… Had 1,262 yards rushing and 20 touchdowns as a senior… As a junior, had 1,951 yards rushing and 37 touchdowns… Chosen for All-American Bowl. | | | | | | |
| **Dreyden Norwood** | DB | 6-1 | 175 | ★★★★ | Ft. Smith, AR | Northside |
| Ranked No. 24 cornerback nationally and No. 2 player in Arkansas by 247Sports.com… Had 943 yards receiving and seven touchdowns in eight games as a senior … As a junior, had eight rushing touchdowns and five receiving touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Kenneth (Trey) Phillips, III** | LB | 6-0 | 219 | ★★★ | Richmond | Ft. Bend Bush |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 58 outside linebacker nationally. | | | | | | |
| **Albert Regis** | DL | 6-1 | 300 | ★★★★ | La Porte | La Porte |
| Ranked No. 18 defensive tackle nationally and No. 41 player in Texas by 247Sports.com… Two-time All-District as tight end and defensive lineman… As a senior, had 71 tackles, including four tackles for loss, and two quarterback sacks… Ranked No. 50 player in Texas by TexAgs. | | | | | | |
| **Jordan Spasojevic-Moko** | OL | 6-5 | 325 | ★★★ | Brisbane, AUS | |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 6 junior college player and No. 1 junior college offensive tackle nationally (Snow College) and No. 1 player in Australia… Former semi-pro rugby player. | | | | | | |
| **Eli Stowers** | QB | 6-4 | 215 | ★★★★ | Corinth | Denton Guyer |
| Ranked No. 5 dual-threat quarterback nationally and No. 14 player in Texas by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had 2,487 yards passing and 18 touchdowns… Had 1,078 yards rushing and 18 touchdowns… Had 2,969 yards passing and 36 touchdowns as a junior… Had 1,166 yards rushing and 11 touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Remington Strickland** | OL | 6-4 | 300 | ★★★ | Sugar Land | Ft. Bend Christian |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 6 center nationally and No. 68 player in Texas… Ranked No. 41 player in Texas by TexAgs. | | | | | | |
| **Shemar Turner** | DL | 6-3 | 280 | ★★★★★ | DeSoto | DeSoto |
| Ranked No. 37 player and No. 5 strongside defensive end nationally and No. 9 player in Texas by 247Sports.com… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game… Two-time All-District… Had 76 tackles, including 24 tackles for loss, 12.5 quarterback sacks, and two fumbles recovered, including one for a touchdown, as a senior. | | | | | | |
| **Matthew Wykoff** | OL | 6-6 | 325 | ★★★ | Magnolia | Magnolia |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 40 offensive tackle nationally and No. 52 player in Texas… All-State as a junior… Ranked as No. 27 player in Texas by TexAgs. | | | | | | |
| **Trey Zuhn** | OL | 6-6 | 310 | ★★★★ | Ft. Collins, CO | Fossil Ridge |
| Ranked No. 26 offensive tackle and No. 300 player nationally and No. 2 player in Colorado by 247Sports.com. | | | | | | |

# PLAYER PROFILE

## Spiller is #28 Like His Idol, but Creates his Own Footsteps

When Fred Spiller's oldest child turned 8 years old, he signed him up to play youth football.

"First time Isaiah touched the ball he went 80 yards for a touchdown," Fred said with a chuckle. "From that moment on he fell in love with football."

Isaiah, a running back from the start, began mirroring his game after NFL icon Adrian Peterson. So when Isaiah was being recruited out of Klein Collins High School (Spring, Texas), he was enamored with the college Peterson where finished second in the Heisman Trophy voting back in 2004 — Oklahoma.

"Isaiah wears No. 28 because of Adrian Peterson," Fred said. "When he got an offer from Oklahoma he said, 'I'm going to college where Adrian Peterson played!'"

Fred had been a tight end at Texas A&M at the turn of the century before a back injury ended his career. Despite his allegiance to A&M, Fred couldn't fault his son's choice, as then-A&M coach Kevin Sumlin had a reputation for emphasizing the pass over the run.

But when Sumlin was fired in November 2017 and A&M hired Jimbo Fisher the following month, the move grabbed the attention of both Spillers.

"Coach Fisher runs the ball and his running backs can catch the ball," Fred said. "Then at the Nike Opening camp (in Frisco, Texas) in 2018 Isaiah started getting among all those A&M recruits, and he called me up and said, 'I'm committing to A&M.' With Jimbo Fisher's offense, I was much happier for him to be at A&M."

He wouldn't follow in the footsteps of his idol to Norman, Okla., but created some of his own footsteps to College Station, just 90 minutes from home. But he'd still get to wear No. 28.

Isaiah was pressed into a starting role as a true freshman in 2019 and has established himself as one of the top backs in the SEC with his combination of power and speed. He was one of only three SEC running backs to top 1,000 yards in 2020.

"I just come in with the mindset every day that I really don't know anything," Isaiah said. "So I can keep learning and keep getting better."

Fisher said that approach has served him well.

"He was able to pick things up early, he's very intelligent," Fisher said. "Isaiah is big, physical and strong, and he's very open to coaching. That's the great thing – he's got even more upside."

RB
ISAIAH SPILLER
Photo by Steve Beyer

For more coverage visit lindyssports.com/college-football/sec/texas-am

# BEST AND BRIGHTEST

## MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

### RB ISAIAH SPILLER

One of only three SEC running backs to rush for at least 1,000 yards (1,036) in 2020, the junior will be counted on to carry the offense on his broad shoulders following the departure of starting quarterback Kellen Mond and four starting offensive linemen. … The emergence of Devon Achane in the backfield late last season offered a change of pace and should only enhance Spiller's impact in 2021. … Had six 100-yard rushing games last season.

## EMERGING STAR

### CB JAYLON JONES

He looked like a true lockdown corner at times (something A&M has lacked for a decade), leading the defense as a true freshman with six pass breakups. … Jimbo Fisher loves Jones' size (6-2, 205) and physicality in matching up with big SEC receivers, and the sophomore is shaping up as a future first round pick in the NFL Draft. … Was a five-star recruit in the 2020 class, according to the 247Sports Composite.

## TOP NEWCOMER

### DL SHEMAR TURNER

The lone five-star prospect in the class of 2021 (chose A&M over Alabama and Texas), he could make an immediate impact on an already talented defensive line. … The presence of veterans DeMarvin Leal and Jayden Peevy should help free up Turner to make an impact as a pass rusher. … Was set to arrive over the summer. … Rated the No. 21 overall recruit — and the No. 3 defensive tackle — in the country in the 247Sports Composite.

# COASTAL CAROLINA | CHANTICLEERS

**RANKING 23**

Sun Belt rank: 1 | Record: 11-1 | Sun Belt: 8-0 (1st, East) | Stadium: Brooks Stadium (15,000)

## CHANTICLEERS at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Conway, S.C.
**COACH:** Jamey Chadwell — At Coastal Carolina and overall: 19-17, 3 years
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS:** Willy Korn, Newland Isaac
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Chad Staggs

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** 2020, Sun Belt co-champion
**LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING:** 2019
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 21; 9 offense, 10 defense, kicker, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB Grayson McCall, RB Reese White, WR Jaivon Heiligh, TE Isaiah Likely, DE Jeffrey Gunter, DT C.J. Brewer, CB D'Jordan Strong, SS Alex Spillum

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** The Chanticleers are pretty much loaded everywhere with the loss of only three starters. McCall is a dual threat, and White logged seven starts in sharing the rushing load with CJ Marable. Coastal Carolina is building off a season in which it beat BYU and was ranked for the first time.

**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** Marable's receiving skills out of the backfield (31 catches for 228 yards) will be missed, as will DE Tarron Jackson's pass rushing (8.5 sacks). There are depth issues at some spots. Can Coastal repeat last year's great turnover margin (plus 1.08 per game)?

**GRAYSON McCALL**
Photo by Douglas DeFelice-USA TODAY Sports

"We were able to fill some positions that will help us continue to build our program."
— Coach Jamey Chadwell on the recruiting class

## OFFENSE

Nine starters return to an offense that led the Sun Belt in scoring (37.2 points per game) and ranked third in total offense (449.8 yards per game) and rushing (218.3 yards per game).

Let's just put it this way: The Chanticleers have everything they need to make a run at a second league and division title after that out-of-nowhere 11-1 season.

All-Sun Belt quarterback Grayson McCall, who led the conference in total offense (277.9 yards per game), heads the list of returnees. McCall threw 26 touchdown passes (10th nationally) despite missing one game because of injury issues. He was second on the team in rushing with 569 yards.

Wide receiver Sam Denmark (15 catches, 267 yards) is gone, but top wideout Jaivon Heiligh is back after earning first-team All-Sun Belt honors. He ranked in the top five in the conference in receptions (5.4) and receiving yards (83.2) per game.

In addition to Heiligh, who had 10 touchdown receptions, all-conference tight end Isaiah Likely enters his senior season with 74 career receptions for 1,138 yards.

The biggest loss on offense is running back CJ Marable, who signed with the Chicago Bears as an undrafted free agent. Reese White, who started seven games on his way to 478 yards last season, is ready to step up at the position.

First-team All-Sun Belt guard Trey Carter heads a cast of five returning starters on the offensive line. Guard Willie Lampkin was second-team all-conference, and center Sam Thompson earned third-team honors.

That leaves only two spots at wide receiver to be filled.

## DEFENSE

The Chanticleers lose the league's Defensive Player of the Year in defensive end Tarron Jackson — a sixth-round pick by the Philadelphia Eagles — but otherwise return 10 starters to a unit that ranked third in the league in total defense, allowing 351.9 yards per game.

Leading the returning veterans are end Jeffrey Gunter and tackle C.J. Brewer, who joined Jackson in receiving first-team all-league honors, They combined for 13 sacks (6.5 each), and Gunter led the league in forced fumbles with six.

First-team all-conference corner D'Jordan Strong picked off five passes.

Linebacker Silas Kelly (a team-best 80 tackles with five sacks) was second-team all-conference, and linebacker Teddy Gallagher (76 tackles) and safety Alex Spillum (four interceptions) were third-team selections.

End Emmanuel Johnson, a transfer from Georgia Tech, looks to be the only new starter entering fall camp.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Second-team all-conference kicker Massimo Biscardi was 11 of 13 on field-goal attempts, including a 40-yarder with four seconds remaining in the 30-27 win at Louisiana. Charles Ouverson averaged 40.5 yards on 35 punts with more than half (18) downed inside the opponents' 20.

Heiligh (punts) and Jones (kickoffs) are experienced returners.

## OVERVIEW

After going from least in the East in 2019 to first in the division and a conference co-championship in 2020, the Chanticleers have all the ingredients for another title run. The key date is Oct. 20 when they visit Appalachian State.

## TOP NEWCOMER

**DE Emmanuel Johnson:** Johnson arrives just in time to take the spot vacated by Sun Belt Defensive Player of the Year Tarron Jackson. A three-star prospect coming out of Fort Dorchester High in North Charleston, S.C., Johnson played in seven games as a true freshman at Georgia Tech in 2020, recording one tackle. He had 21 tackles for loss (12 sacks) as a high school senior.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **OFFENSE** | | | | | |
| QB | 10 | Grayson McCall* | 6-3 | 200 | So. |
| RB | 2 | Reese White* | 5-10 | 185 | Jr. |
| WR | 11 | Kameron Brown | 6-3 | 220 | Sr. |
| WR | 6 | Jaivon Heiligh* | 6-2 | 190 | Sr. |
| WR | 20 | Greg Latushko | 5-10 | 210 | Sr. |
| TE | 4 | Isaiah Likely* | 6-4 | 245 | Sr. |
| LT | 72 | Antwine Loper* | 6-3 | 275 | Sr. |
| LG | 57 | Willie Lampkin* | 6-1 | 295 | So. |
| C | 51 | Sam Thompson* | 5-9 | 290 | Sr. |
| RG | 63 | Trey Carter* | 6-1 | 300 | Sr. |
| RT | 79 | Steven Bedosky* | 6-2 | 280 | Sr. |
| **DEFENSE** | | | | | |
| DE | 91 | Emmanuel Johnson | 6-6 | 265 | So. |
| NT | 15 | Jerrod Clark* | 6-4 | 335 | Jr. |
| DT | 52 | C.J. Brewer* | 6-2 | 280 | Sr. |
| DE | 94 | Jeffrey Gunter* | 6-4 | 260 | Sr. |
| LB | 34 | Teddy Gallagher* | 6-1 | 230 | Sr. |
| LB | 29 | Silas Kelly* | 6-4 | 230 | Sr. |
| LB | 43 | Enock Makonzo* | 5-11 | 195 | Sr. |
| CB | 23 | Derick Bush* | 6-1 | 190 | Sr. |
| CB | 7 | D'Jordan Strong* | 5-11 | 175 | Sr. |
| SS | 10 | Alex Spillum* | 6-2 | 190 | Sr. |
| FS | 26 | Brayden Matts* | 6-1 | 200 | Sr. |
| **SPECIAL TEAMS** | | | | | |
| K | 29 | Massimo Biscardi* | 5-11 | 200 | Sr. |
| P | 98 | Charles Ouverson* | 6-1 | 230 | Sr. |

*Returning starters in Bold

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | THE CITADEL |
| Sept. 11 | KANSAS |
| Sept. 18 | at Buffalo |
| Sept. 25 | UMASS |
| Oct. 2 | LOUISIANA-MONROE |
| Oct. 7 | at Arkansas State |
| Oct. 20 | at Appalachian State |
| Oct. 28 | TROY |
| Nov. 6 | at Georgia Southern |
| Nov. 13 | GEORGIA STATE |
| Nov. 20 | TEXAS STATE |
| Nov. 26 | at South Alabama |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| W | at Kansas | 38-23 |
| W | CAMPBELL | 43-21 |
| W | ARKANSAS STATE | 52-23 |
| W | at Louisiana | 30-27 |
| W | GEORGIA SOUTHERN | 28-14 |
| W | at Georgia State | 51-0 |
| W | SOUTH ALABAMA | 23-6 |
| W | APPALACHIAN STATE | 34-23 |
| W | at Texas State | 49-14 |
| | LIBERTY | |
| W | BYU | 22-17 |
| W | at Troy | 42-38 |
| **SUN BELT CHAMPIONSHIP GAME** | | |
| | vs. Louisiana | CAN |
| | **CURE BOWL** | |
| L | vs. Liberty (OT) | 34-37 |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 37.2 | 18 |
| Rushing | 218.3 | 15 |
| Passing | 231.5 | 60 |
| Total | 449.8 | 25 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 20.2 | T-19 |
| Rushing | 147.7 | 47 |
| Passing | 204.2 | 32 |
| Total | 351.9 | 31 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| +13 | +1.08 | 9 |

# VANDERBILT COMMODORES

For more coverage of the Commodores, visit vanderbilt.247Sports.com

**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** David Raih **DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Jesse Minter **STADIUM:** Vanderbilt Stadium: 39,790

## NEW HOPE: LEA COMES HOME TO LEAD 'DORES AFTER WINLESS YEAR

Since World War II, Vanderbilt has mostly repeated a cycle of bringing in coaches, watching them fail and then starting over.

The latest hire is Notre Dame defensive coordinator Clark Lea, who knows the situation well: He's the son of a Vanderbilt alum, grew up in Nashville, walked on to the Commodore football team from 2002-04 and earned two degrees at Vandy.

What Lea inherits is distinctly different in two ways — one bad and another good.

The program bottomed out in coach Derek Mason's last two seasons, though much was beyond Mason's control. Morale was awful; quarterback Ken Seals uses the word "selfish" many times to describe player attitudes. Opt-outs came early and often and continued with mounting losses.

The dam broke in a 41-0 shellacking on Nov. 28 at Missouri. Mason had lost the team and was fired the next day. More players quit; Vandy barely had enough players for a 42-17 pasting by Tennessee. A small COVID-19 outbreak then forced the cancellation of the Georgia game and the end of the season.

With that, Vanderbilt hit a new low, experiencing the first winless campaign since the school started playing football in 1890.

"You have this kind of heartfelt belief in a program and its potential, and yet you're coming back at a time where it experienced such disappointment," Lea said.

New chancellor Daniel Diermeier made the calls on Mason and Lea. He leaned heavily on Vandy baseball coach Tim Corbin's recommendation on the hire. Corbin — Vandy's most successful coach ever in any sport — knew Lea during his playing days and the two remained close.

Corbin is the master of details, which left a profound influence on Lea.

"It's the small things Coach Lea wants us to master. Making sure things are cleaned up after you leave; you're leaving your space better than you found it; you're thanking people; you're being appreciative for everything you're given," Seals said.

The other distinction: Vandy finally has a chancellor who has prioritized sports success.

The school soon made Lea's space much better than he found it. In April, Diermeier announced a $300 million capital campaign for improving athletics facilities, with football getting the bulk of the investment. Locker room renovations have started. Construction on a new football operations facility begins at the end of this season.

Meanwhile, Lea has broken ground on changing attitudes, and everyone's noticed.

"The individuality, the selfishness, I feel like is being eliminated," Seals said. "The expectations are much higher. It's welcomed among all the players. ... I think that's going to make us a probably better football team and better men and people when we leave, in general."

### OFFENSE

The Commodores don't have the talent compared to the rest of the league, so keeping possession and controlling clock will be important under first-time offensive coordinator David Raih.

"At receiver, you have some big-bodied guys who can catch the football," Lea said, "so that gives you a chance to have a complementary possession game, where you have a strong running attack. We think we have some good runners, but you also have the ability to catch the ball and stay in rhythm with the passing game.

"We have to identify where the chunk plays are coming from. ... That's both play design and having guys step up in roles as playmakers."

Ken Seals arrived on campus in January 2020, seized the quarterback job in spring practice and never came close to losing it. He had some issues with ball security and sometimes forced throws, but he showed poise, accuracy and leadership uncommon for a freshman.

Mike Wright, the team's fastest player — he ran a 10.87 in the 100 meters in high school — wasn't accurate enough to push Seals a year ago but improved this spring.

"We're keeping the quarterback competition open and they know that," Lea said. "I thought Ken had a good spring. Mike Wright had a really good finish to spring

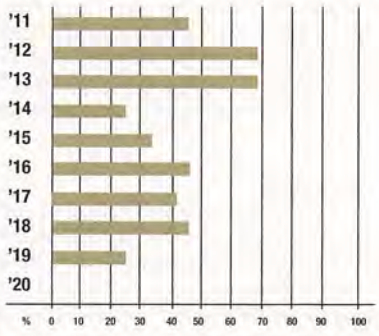
## SCHEDULE

| Date | Opponent | '20 Record |
|---|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | EAST TENNESSEE STATE | 4-2 |
| Sept. 11 | at Colorado State | 1-3 |
| Sept. 18 | STANFORD | 4-2 |
| Sept. 25 | GEORGIA | 8-2 |
| Oct. 2 | CONNECTICUT | 0-0 |
| Oct. 9 | at Florida | 8-4 |
| Oct. 16 | at South Carolina | 2-8 |
| Oct. 23 | MISSISSIPPI STATE | 4-7 |
| Oct. 30 | MISSOURI | 5-5 |
| Nov. 13 | KENTUCKY | 5-6 |
| Nov. 20 | at Ole Miss | 5-5 |
| Nov. 27 | at Tennessee | 3-7 |

## RESULTS

| 0-9, 0-9 | | |
|---|---|---|
| L | at Texas A&M | 12-17 |
| L | LSU | 7-41 |
| L | SOUTH CAROLINA | 7-41 |
| L | OLE MISS | 21-54 |
| L | at Mississippi State | 17-24 |
| L | at Kentucky | 35-38 |
| L | FLORIDA | 17-38 |
| L | at Missouri | 0-41 |
| L | TENNESSEE | 17-42 |

## 10-YEAR WINNING TREND



## AT A GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Nashville, Tenn.

**2020:** 0-9 overall, 0-9 SEC (7th, East)

**COACH:** Clark Lea — At Vanderbilt and overall, 1st year

**RETURNING STARTERS:** 15; 8 offense, 6 defense, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:**
QB Ken Seals, RB Re'Mahn Davis, WR Cam Johnson, WR Chris Pierce Jr., TE Ben Bresnahan, LB Ethan Barr, DB Jaylen Mahoney

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:**
Seals leads an offense that showed surprising promise over portions of 2020, and there are a number of skill players returning. The offensive line, one of America's greenest a year ago, will have experience and depth with the return of three opt-outs who might have started last season.

**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:**
The defense lacked speed and strength a year ago, and then lost its best two players from that unit. And while the new staff brought a burst of optimism, the Commodores have a first-time head coach, a first-time offensive coordinator who's never called plays and new schemes on each side of the ball.

**KEY LOSSES:**
RB Keyon Henry-Brooks, C Grant Miller, OL Connor Mignone, DE Dayo Odeyingbo, DT Cameron Tidd, LB Andre Mintze, LB Dimitri Moore

**OVERVIEW:**
Talent and morale were awful a year ago, leading to the first winless season in program history. Lea, a Vandy alum, knows this is a lengthy rebuild. The offense can make some games interesting, but a lack of overall team speed, strength and identifiable defensive talent mean a four-win season would be a significant accomplishment.

**KEY NUMBER:**
**-8** That was the Commodores' turnover margin last year; only nine FBS teams posted worse margins. That included just two interceptions.

**WR Cam JOHNSON**

Photo by AP Photo/Mark Humphrey

CB
**Jaylen Mahoney**
Photo by Joe Robbins

## SCOUTING REPORT: Offense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **QB** | **Ken Seals*** | So. | Started every game as a true freshman in 2020. | Mike Wright, So. |
| RB | Re'Mahn Davis | Jr. | Had 1,502 yards from scrimmage in 16 games at Temple. | Ja'Veon Marlow, Sr. |
| **WR** | **Cam Johnson*** | Sr. | Sure-handed slot wideout has 90 career catches. | Devin Boddie Jr., Jr. |
| **WR** | **Chris Pierce Jr.*** | Sr. | Fifth-year vet started to flash big-play potential. | Logan Kyle, So. |
| **WR** | **Amir Abdur-Rahman*** | Sr. | Posted a team-leading 15.0 yards per catch in '20. | Will Sheppard, So. |
| **TE** | **Ben Bresnahan*** | Sr. | He's capable of a big receiving year. | Gavin Schoenwald, Sr. |
| LT | Cole Clemens | Sr. | Two-year starter is back after opting out last season. | Brayden Bapst, Jr. |
| **LG** | **Tyler Steen*** | Sr. | Started every game at left tackle last year. | Bryce Bailey, Sr. |
| C | Kevo Wesley | So. | Career experience consists of backup duty in '20 finale. | Julian Hernandez, Jr. |
| **RG** | **Drew Birchmeier*** | Sr. | Converted from DT last August; made five OL starts. | Ben Cox, So. |
| **RT** | **Bradley Ashmore*** | So. | Made one start at LG, four at RT last year. | Junior Uzebu, Jr. |
| PK | Joseph Bulovas | Sr. | Converted 22 of 29 field goal attempts at Alabama. | Pierson Cooke, Sr. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

## SCOUTING REPORT: Defense

| POS | STARTER | YR. | COMMENT | BACKUP/KEY DEPTH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | Elijah McAllister | Sr. | Missed all of 2020; had 2.5 sacks in '19. | Nate Clifton, Jr. |
| **DT** | **Raashaan Wilkins Jr.*** | Sr. | Made nine 9 starts, with just eight tackles, last year. | Malik Langham, Sr. |
| DT | Daevion Davis | Jr. | His 18 tackles last year leads DL returnees. | Rutger Reitmaier, Sr. |
| DE | Christian James | Jr. | Broke into the rotation in the second half of 2020. | Alex Williams, Jr. |
| LB | Ethan Barr | So. | Nine games, three starts in 2020 as true freshman. | Brayden DeVault-Smith, Sr. |
| **LB** | **Anfernee Orji*** | Jr. | Former DB led team with 66 tackles last season. | Feleti Afemui, Sr. |
| LB | De'Rickey Wright | So. | Will have a role as a hybrid DB/LB. | Michael Owusu, Sr. |
| **CB** | **Allan George*** | Sr. | His 21 career starts leads all Vandy DBs. | Gabe Jeudy-Lally, Jr. |
| **CB** | **Jaylen Mahoney*** | Jr. | Led defense in snaps in '20 but played better in '19. | B.J. Anderson, Sr. |
| **SS** | **Maxwell Worship*** | Sr. | Made six starts in '20; may have been team's best DB. | Justin Harris, Jr. |
| **FS** | **Dashaun Jerkins*** | Sr. | 15 career starts; forced two fumbles last year. | Brendon Harris, Sr. |
| P | **Harrison Smith*** | Sr. | Averaged 41.0 yards per punt last year. | Jared Wheatley, Jr. |

***Returning Starter in Bold**

and really came on late."

Look for transfer Re'Mahn Davis to be a high-volume workload back. Davis proved to be hard to tackle this spring. Ja'Veon Marlow has shown shiftiness, speed and pass-catching ability but has had trouble staying healthy.

At receiver, Cam Johnson and Chris Pierce Jr. are dependable pass catchers, and Amir Abdur-Rahman is capable of generating big plays. Backup Will Sheppard was probably the MVP of the spring game with a three-touchdown effort, which included several athletic plays.

Ben Bresnahan is a dependable target who should rank among the league's receiving leaders at tight end. Backup Gavin Schoenwald can catch, too, and he and Justin Ball may see elevated roles.

There were no expectations for Vanderbilt's green offensive line a year ago, but the young group showed some flashes of competence and now returns a combination of experience and depth. Ten linemen have made at least one start, with 69 among them.

Cole Clemens, Vandy's most experienced lineman, sat out in 2020. He was mostly a guard under the former staff but started at left tackle in the spring. Right tackle Bradley Ashmore played all nine games in his first year on campus last year, making five starts.

Tyler Steen (last year's starting left tackle) slides one spot to guard. A slew of experienced players will battle at the other two spots, though second-year player Kevo Wesley, who played just once in 2020, has the edge at center.

"That group is coming together," Lea said.

## DEFENSE

Former Baltimore Ravens defensive backs coach Jesse Minter is the new coordinator and prefers a 4-2-5 scheme. Minter's last experience both in college and as a coordinator came at Georgia State in 2016. Before that, he was at Indiana State, both times turning miserable units into good ones.

He'll need to do that again.

Last year, Vanderbilt got whipped at the point of attack, lost one footrace after another in the secondary and didn't tackle well. Vanderbilt allowed 37.3 points per game, 5.7 yards per rush, 8.9 yards per pass and forced just nine turnovers (two interceptions).

The team's top six tacklers — in order, Anfernee Orji, Jaylen Mahoney, Allan George, Dashaun Jerkins, Brendon Harris and Ethan Barr — return. However, those top five tacklers were defensive backs, and the only two linemen with more than 18 tackles are gone. Returning players generated just 4.5 sacks and one interception.

The defense allowed 68 points in the spring game as last year's problems popped up again.

"In the spring, the defense showed strong, aggressive play, a physical point-of-

## TOP 5 NFL PROSPECTS

**1. Ben Bresnahan** TE 6-4 244 4.78 Sr.

A reliable safety valve underneath in the passing attack for the Commodores, Bresnahan has emerged as quarterback Ken Seals' go-to target. He possesses excellent size, to go along with dependable hands. Bresnahan enjoyed career-highs across the board in receptions (28), receiving yards (300) and touchdowns (4) in 2020 and appears poised for an even larger role this season.

He originally wanted to attend Vanderbilt as a baseball player but committed to football in high school and began working out with Cincinnati Bengals offensive line legend Willie Anderson to help improve his blocking. While he has excelled at developing both his receiving and blocking skill-sets, he has also starred in the classroom as an All-SEC academic team selection. A possession-type receiver capable of moving the chains, Bresnahan could find himself in the mix to hear his name called during draft weekend with another productive campaign in Nashville.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2. Re'Mahn Davis** | **RB** | **5-9** | **215** | **4.58** | **Jr.** |
| **3. Ja'Veon Marlow** | **RB** | **5-11** | **195** | **4.55** | **Sr.** |
| **4. Jaylen Mahoney** | **CB** | **5-11** | **185** | **4.52** | **Jr.** |
| **5. Cam Johnson** | **WR** | **6-0** | **198** | **4.60** | **Sr.** |

— Ric Serritella, NFL Draft Bible

Photo by AP Photo/Rogelio V. Solis

attack presence and for the majority of the spring, held the upper hand in competitive segments. ... In the spring game, the offense found a rhythm and was able to put some pressure on the defense, and I didn't like how the defense responded," Lea said.

The best hope for change starts up front, where the hope is that some formerly highly-rated line recruits who started their careers elsewhere — whether that's Derek Green (Oklahoma), Malik Langham (Florida), Alex Williams (Ohio State) or Rutger Reitmaier (Oregon) — materialize. Green was out, and Langham (who'll play three-technique) was the best of that bunch in the spring.

Daevion Davis has had the best Vandy career among the returnees and should start again. Elijah McAllister ended the spring as the starter at the "star" portion; he's a rangy, 6-6 athlete with some disruptive potential. Christian James ended spring as the starter at the five-technique. Vandy signed five freshman linemen and several may have a shot to play.

Barr should start at linebacker and make the defensive calls. The Commodores could flank him with a pair of hybrid linebacker/safety types in Anfernee Orji (who's played a similar role at Vandy before) and De'Rickey Wright. Backup Michael Owusu could be used as a stand-up end.

Returning starters Jaylen Mahoney (field) and Allan George (boundary) retained their starting jobs this spring. Max Worship and Dashaun Jerkins have started before and ended the spring as safety starters.

But as Lea said: "It's about putting the best 11 on the field; we're not going to leave any stone unturned."

How Wright adapts and how three defensive backs who spent the spring hurt (Justin Harris, B.J. Anderson and Gabe Jeudy-Lally) perform when healthy could dictate much of what the team does.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Joseph Bulovas didn't see the field at Alabama last year, but his 2019 production (8 of 11 FGs, 59 of 61 PATs) would be a big step up from what Vandy had in 2020. Steady Harrison Smith has never had a punt blocked; he's averaged 42.3 yards for his career and starts for a third straight season.

The return game is uncertain, but Cam Johnson may be the best option if the Commodores don't mind using a starting receiver there.

## SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

The Commodores should be able to snap a 10-game losing streak in the season opener vs. the last team they beat (East Tennessee State) in a rematch of 2019's 38-0 blowout.

A win the next week at Colorado State, in what looks like a pick-em game, could provide a confidence boost, and a return home the following week against Stanford should be a barometer of how competitive the 'Dores are in the rebuilding process.

Vanderbilt will once again be underdogs in all conference games; best chances for wins seem to be Oct. 23 against Mississippi State (a game Vandy should have won in 2020) and Nov. 27 at Tennessee, a rivalry game that's been more evenly matched over the last 15 years than most would expect given each program's history.

— Chris Lee

### 2018 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 28.5 | T-69 |
| Rushing | 167.5 | T-66 |
| Passing | 243.7 | T-54 |
| Total | 411.2 | 58 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 26.6 | 61 |
| Rushing | 194.7 | 94 |
| Passing | 244.2 | 85 |
| Total | 438.9 | 99 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| +8 | +0.62 | T-20 |

### 2019 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 16.5 | 125 |
| Rushing | 127.3 | 111 |
| Passing | 172.0 | 115 |
| Total | 299.3 | 123 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 31.8 | 95 |
| Rushing | 208.8 | 115 |
| Passing | 227.8 | 66 |
| Total | 436.6 | 101 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 2 | - 0.17 | 83 |

### 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 14.8 | 125 |
| Rushing | 110.1 | 113 |
| Passing | 219.9 | T-72 |
| Total | 330.0 | 110 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 37.3 | 112 |
| Rushing | 191.0 | 91 |
| Passing | 296.4 | 119 |
| Total | 487.4 | 121 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 8 | - 0.89 | 115 |

# NOTEBOOK

A mid-December coaching change coming off an 0-9 record isn't a recipe for a good recruiting class, but the Commodores signed the country's 48th-best recruiting class, according to the 247Sports Composite.

That included five defensive linemen, an area in which Vanderbilt generally has difficulty finding quality.

Much credit for holding the class together goes to former Commodore defensive lineman **Jovan Haye**, the only assistant coach retained from the previous staff. Haye will coach defensive ends.

• Head coach **Clark Lea** and Haye aren't the only former Commodore football players on staff.

Former Vandy running back **Norval McKenzie** was hired over the winter from Louisville, where he coached running backs from 2019-20. He'll also serve as the run game coordinator. The playing careers of the trio overlapped from 2002-04, when **Bobby Johnson** was Vanderbilt's head coach.

• The Commodores lost three potential starters after Lee's arrival in running back **Keyon Henry-Brooks**, center **Grant Miller** and safety **Donovan Kaufman**, who hit the transfer portal in the spring.

Henry-Brooks led VU with 494 rushing yards in just six games, while Kaufman — who might have been Vandy's most talented returning defender — played just twice as a true freshman due to health-related issues. Miller, who barely came off the field in 2020, landed at Baylor and should start there.

• Lea spoke this spring of a 10-year "vision for success" for Vanderbilt football, but clarified how that translated in the short term.

"We work every day to maximize this roster we have right now and to put it in the best competitive position we can be in. All our systems aren't directed towards long-term goals. … There's an incredible short-term focus on how we set ourselves up for the results we want this fall, and our players feel that every single day," he said.

"When I speak of 10-year success, what I mean is, more than anything else, my intention is to be here to see that success through, which means we don't make decisions for the future of this program that compromise where we'll be in 10 years for some kind of bump in excitement and attention in the short term."

## OPPOSING COACHES VIEW

• "(New coach) Clark Lea played there at Vanderbilt, and he understands the nature of the school. I don't think Derek Mason completely understood Vanderbilt. If Clark Lea is as charismatic as James Franklin, that would help make it a good place, a hip place. The good news is he understands and knows the task ahead of him.…

• "Vanderbilt is a tough job. It's a great school. Vanderbilt, in the SEC, is the student-athlete model. But they need to commit to facilities to get higher-level players, and maybe now they are doing that, but it will take some time. …

• "(Freshman quarterback) Ken Seals is a good player, but he's just a guy in the SEC. He reminds me of Jordan Rodgers, the kid they had a few years back (he played in 2011 and 2012). He's a good quarterback, but he's not elite."

# COMMODORES SPRING ROSTER

| Quarterback | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Yr. | Hometown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12 Jack Bowen | QB | 6-0 | 187 | Sr. | Grand Rapids, MI |
| 6 Jeremy Moussa | QB | 6-3 | 219 | Sr. | Chino Hills, CA |
| 8 Ken Seals | QB | 6-3 | 218 | So. | Azle, TX |
| 5 Mike Wright | QB | 6-3 | 187 | So. | Fayetteville, GA |
| **Running Back** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| Re'Mahn Davis | RB | 5-9 | 215 | Jr. | San Francisco, CA |
| 9 Rocko Griffin | RB | 5-9 | 205 | So. | Rincon, GA |
| 3 Ja'Veon Marlow | RB | 5-11 | 195 | Sr. | Winter Haven, FL |
| **Wide Receivers** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 2 Amir Abdur-Rahman | WR | 6-4 | 217 | Sr. | Atlanta, GA |
| 11 Tyrell Alexander | WR | 6-1 | 184 | Sr. | Lancaster, TX |
| 14 Devin Boddie Jr. | WR | 5-11 | 168 | Jr. | Memphis |
| 7 Cam Johnson | WR | 6-0 | 198 | Sr. | Brentwood |
| 18 Logan Kyle | WR | 6-3 | 207 | So. | Cypress, TX |
| 19 Chris Pierce Jr. | WR | 6-4 | 231 | Sr. | Smithfield, VA |
| 81 Will Sheppard | WR | 6-3 | 190 | So. | Mandeville, LA |
| **Tight Ends** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 84 Justin Ball | TE | 6-6 | 245 | Jr. | Glenn Dale, MD |
| 86 Ben Bresnahan | TE | 6-4 | 244 | Sr. | Cumming, GA |
| 85 Joel DeCoursey | TE | 6-4 | 245 | Jr. | Zionsville, IN |
| 89 Diego LaMonica | TE | 6-4 | 230 | So. | Miami, FL |
| 10 Gavin Schoenwald | TE | 6-4 | 237 | Sr. | Brentwood |
| **Offensive Lineman** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 57 Drew Birchmeier | OL/DL | 6-4 | 300 | Sr. | Midlothian, VA |
| 70 Bradley Ashmore | OL | 6-6 | 294 | So. | Neptune Beach, FL |
| 78 Bryce Bailey | OL | 6-5 | 306 | Sr. | Newburgh, IN |
| 69 Brayden Bapst | OL | 6-6 | 300 | Jr. | Washington, DC |
| 68 Jason Brooks, Jr. | OL | 6-4 | 275 | So. | Houston, TX |
| 74 Cole Clemens | OL | 6-6 | 344 | Sr. | South Jordan, UT |
| 75 Ben Cox | OL | 6-5 | 292 | So. | Radford, VA |
| 72 Dan Dawkins | OL | 6-3 | 308 | Sr. | Staten Island, NY |
| 71 Donald Fitzgerald | OL | 6-8 | 305 | Jr. | Nashville |
| 62 Julian Hernandez | OL | 6-4 | 312 | Jr. | Davie, FL |
| Jake Ketschek | OL | 6-4 | 310 | Fr. | Absecon, NJ |
| Gage Pitchford | OL | 6-6 | 295 | Fr. | Newnan, GA |
| 54 Tyler Steen | OL | 6-5 | 317 | Sr. | Miami, FL |
| 73 Jonathan Stewart | OL | 6-7 | 324 | Sr. | Lawrenceville, GA |
| Junior Uzebu | OL | 6-6 | 305 | Jr. | Atlanta, GA |
| 65 Michael Warden | OL | 6-2 | 289 | Sr. | Loveland, OH |
| 67 Trent Weaver | OL | 6-3 | 290 | So. | St. Louis, MO |
| 52 Kevo Wesley | OL | 6-4 | 296 | So. | Chicago, IL |
| Delfin Xavier Castillo | OL | 6-5 | 310 | Fr. | Kissimmee, FL |
| **Defensive Lineman** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| Marcus Bradley | DL | 6-3 | 270 | Fr. | Gaithersburg, MD |
| 96 Nate Clifton | DL | 6-5 | 267 | Jr. | La Vergne |
| 9 Daevion Davis | DL | 6-2 | 285 | Jr. | Madison, AL |
| 92 Derek Green | DL | 6-5 | 320 | Jr. | Richlands, NC |
| 44 Christian James | DL | 6-4 | 250 | Jr. | Memphis |
| 99 Malik Langham | DL | 6-5 | 290 | Sr. | Huntsville, AL |
| 94 Rutger Reitmaier | DL | 6-3 | 266 | Sr. | Nashville |
| Terion Sugick | DL | 6-2 | 305 | Fr. | Landover, MD |
| 97 Lorenza Surgers | DL | 6-5 | 258 | Sr. | Cary, NC |
| 93 Tolu Thomas-Ailara | DL | 6-3 | 252 | Sr. | Chicago Heights, IL |
| 95 Raashaan Wilkins Jr. | DL | 6-3 | 307 | Sr. | Chicago, IL |
| 8 Alex Williams | DL | 6-6 | 260 | Jr. | Akron, OH |
| **Linebackers** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 17 Feleti Afemui | LB | 6-3 | 244 | Sr. | Kihei, Hawaii |
| 50 Ethan Barr | LB | 6-3 | 236 | So. | Flower Mound, TX |
| 51 Luke Blanton | LB | 6-2 | 237 | Sr. | Dallas, TX |
| 52 Alex Brown | LB | 6-2 | 243 | Sr. | San Antonio, TX |
| 12 Brayden DeVault-Smith | LB | 6-3 | 227 | Sr. | Nashville |
| 53 Tommy Eckels | LB | 6-2 | 229 | So. | Kansas City, MO |
| 41 Elijah McAllister | LB | 6-6 | 245 | Sr. | Rumson, NJ |
| 24 Alston Orji | LB | 6-2 | 245 | Sr. | Rockwall, TX |
| 26 Anfernee Orji | LB | 6-2 | 224 | Jr. | Rockwall, TX |
| 88 Michael Owusu | LB | 6-5 | 240 | Sr. | Oxnard, CA |
| 46 Michael Spencer | LB | 6-4 | 249 | So. | Union, KY |
| 31 AJ Walsh | LB | 6-5 | 232 | So. | Mattawan, MI |
| **Defensive Backs** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 16 BJ Anderson | CB | 6-1 | 190 | Sr. | Andalusia, AL |
| 29 Jack Barton | S/LB | 6-0 | 201 | So. | Dallas, TX |
| 42 Camden Coleman | DB | 6-1 | 207 | Sr. | Champaign, IL |
| 28 Allan George | CB | 6-1 | 187 | Sr. | Andalusia, AL |
| 11 Justin Harris | S | 6-1 | 194 | Jr. | Attalla, AL |
| 13 Brendon Harris | S | 6-1 | 212 | Sr. | Chattanooga |
| John Howse IV | CB | 6-1 | 185 | Fr. | Nashville |
| 33 Dashaun Jerkins | S | 6-0 | 190 | Sr. | Woodbridge, VA |
| 6 Gabe Jeudy-Lally | CB | 6-1 | 180 | Jr. | Charlotte, NC |
| 22 Chase Lloyd | DB | 6-2 | 207 | So. | Atlanta, GA |
| 23 Jaylen Mahoney | CB | 5-11 | 185 | Jr. | Rock Hill, SC |
| 27 Ryan McCord | CB | 6-1 | 180 | So. | Dallas, TX |
| Tyson Russell | CB | 5-11 | 175 | Fr. | Plantation, FL |
| 14 Maxwell Worship | S | 6-1 | 206 | Sr. | Fort Lauderdale, FL |
| **Specialist** | **Pos.** | **Ht.** | **Wt.** | **Yr.** | **Hometown** |
| 37 Pierson Cooke | K/P | 6-0 | 194 | Sr. | Bloomfield Hills, MI |
| 49 Zach Drevno | LS | 6-0 | 218 | Sr. | Saline, MI |
| 58 Wesley Schelling | LS | 6-5 | 245 | So. | Nashville |
| 95 Harrison Smith | P | 5-10 | 188 | Sr. | Franklin |
| 36 Jared Wheatley | P | 6-1 | 190 | Jr. | Indian Trail, NC |
| 30 De'Rickey Wright | ATH | 6-4 | 207 | So. | Gadsden, AL |

# INDIVIDUAL STATS

## PASSING

| NAME | GP | Effic | Cmp | Att | Int | Pct | Yards | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K. Seals | 9 | 127.6 | 186 | 288 | 10 | 64.6 | 1928 | 12 | 58 | 214.2 |
| M. Wright | 6 | 115.8 | 6 | 10 | 1 | 60.0 | 51 | 1 | 25 | 8.5 |

## RECEIVING

| RECEIVING | GP | No. | Yards | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| C. Johnson | 9 | 56 | 545 | 9.7 | 3 | 40 | 60.6 |
| A. Abdur-Rahman | 9 | 27 | 406 | 15.0 | 1 | 46 | 45.1 |
| K. Henry-Brooks | 6 | 28 | 258 | 9.2 | 0 | 48 | 43.0 |

## RUSHING

| RUSHING | GP | Att. | Gain | Loss | Net | Avg | TD | Lg | Avg/G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K. Henry-Brooks | 6 | 120 | 513 | 19 | 494 | 4.1 | 2 | 27 | 82.3 |
| J. Marlow | 4 | 46 | 193 | 7 | 186 | 4.0 | 0 | 22 | 46.5 |
| J. Wakefield | 4 | 38 | 144 | 21 | 123 | 3.2 | 0 | 15 | 30.6 |

## DEF. LEADERS

Tackles: A. Orji 66, J. Mahoney 57, A. George 45 D. Jerkins 45
Tackles for loss: D. Odeyingbo 8, A. Mintze 5.5, two tied with 2.5
Sacks: D. Odeyingbo 5.5, A. Mintze 4, four tied with 1
Interceptions: G. Jeudy-Lally 1, R. Haynie 11

# 247SPORTS COMMODORES RECRUITING 2021

## 3 NEWCOMERS OF IMPACT

### Re'Mahn Davis

Davis is a transfer from Temple who could start immediately after Keyon Henry-Brooks entered the transfer portal. He rushed for nearly 1,000 yards as a true freshman with the Owls in 2019 and is a powerful runner who can be difficult to take down.

### Alex Williams

Another transfer, Williams left Ohio State for Vanderbilt prior to the 2020 season but opted out before the campaign started and thus has never played a game for the Commodores. He's a pass rushing specialist who will play with his hand on the ground. Vanderbilt will need him to help replace the departing Dayo Odeyingbo.

### John Howse IV

Although plenty of other SEC freshmen were rated higher than Howse coming out of high school, few will get as many opportunities for playing time. Vanderbilt's cornerbacks could be the single weakest position group in the SEC, and Howse has good size at 6-foot-1. He enthusiastically plays to contact and will get a chance to settle in quicker after enrolling in January.

## SLEEPER

### Tyson Russell

Russell got just as many reps in the spring as Howse despite his smaller frame at 5-11, 175. The son of former Miami Dolphins linebacker Twan Russell should be ready to play quickly — he enrolled early and went against top talent every day at practice in high school for Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas.

## 2022 NEEDS

Vanderbilt did not take a quarterback or tight end in its 2021 class, so those are two important positions for 2022. The 'Dores already filled one of those spots with three-star tight end Cole Spence out of Georgia, and Vanderbilt will likely attempt to take two quarterbacks. Clark Lea brings a different defensive scheme than Derek Mason as Vanderbilt will go with a 4-2-5 alignment most of the time. The staff will also need to find edge defenders and hybrid safeties to fit that scheme.

— By Robbie Weinstein, Vandy247.com

## 247SPORTS COMPOSITE

| 0 | 1 | 24 | 0 |
|---|---|---|---|
| ✪✪✪✪✪ | ✪✪✪✪ | ✪✪✪ | ✪✪ |

| | |
|---|---|
| Commitments | 25 |
| Average Stars | 3.04 |
| Total Stars | 76 |
| National Rank: 48 | SEC: 13 |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Tyler Bence** | DL | 6-3 | 280 | ✪✪✪ | Huntsville, AL | Huntsville |
| Invited to play in U.S. Army All-American Game… As a junior, had 11 tackles for loss, 7.5 quarterback sacks, three fumbles caused and two fumbles recovered. | | | | | | |
| **Dylan Betts-Pauley** | RB | 5-11 | 225 | ✪✪✪ | Hoover, AL | Hoover |
| Helped team to quarterfinal win in state playoffs… As a junior, helped team to 10-3 record and state semifinals. | | | | | | |
| **Marcus Bradley** | DL | 6-3 | 270 | ✪✪✪✪ | Gaithersburg, MD | Quince Orchard |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 188 player nationally and No. 8 player in Maryland… Invited to Under Armour All-American Game… Team did not play in 2020… As a junior, had 41 tackles, including seven tackles for loss, and 3.5 quarterback sacks on the season. | | | | | | |
| **Miles Capers** | LB | 6-5 | 225 | ✪✪✪ | Sumter, SC | Sumter |
| Ranked No. 30 player in South Carolina by 247Sports.com… Had 57 tackles, one fumble caused and one fumble recovered as a senior… Anchored a defense that allowed only 107 points for the year. | | | | | | |
| **Gamarion Carter** | WR | 6-2 | 185 | ✪✪✪ | Toccoa, GA | Stephens County |
| As a senior, had 26 receptions for 638 yards and six touchdowns… Had 27 receptions for 421 yards and four touchdowns as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Delfin Xavier Castillo** | OL | 6-5 | 310 | ✪✪✪ | Kissimmee, FL | Osceola |
| Helped team to state playoffs three consecutive years… Helped team to 9-2 record and state championship game as a senior. | | | | | | |
| **Re'Mahn Davis** | RB | 5-9 | 215 | ✪✪✪ | San Francisco, CA | Temple |
| As a junior, had 271 carries for 1,259 yards rushing and nine touchdowns… Had 27 receptions for 243 yards and two touchdowns… Had 4,815 career rushing yards and scored 59 touchdowns. | | | | | | |
| **Gunnar Hansen** | OL | 6-5 | 310 | ✪✪✪ | Boca Raton, FL | St. Thomas Aquinas |
| Helped team to 7-1 record and state championship game as a senior… As a junior, made 27 pancake blocks and allowed just three quarterback sacks. | | | | | | |
| **John Howse, IV** | DB | 6-1 | 185 | ✪✪✪ | Nashville | Brentwood |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 66 cornerback nationally and No. 19 player in Tennessee… As a senior, helped team to state championship game… Had 60 tackles, including five tackles for loss, one quarterback sack and nine passes broken up as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Jacques Hunter** | DL | 6-4 | 225 | ✪✪✪ | Valdosta, GA | Lowndes |
| Helped team to 10-1 record and state semifinals as a senior… As a junior, had 47 tackles and five quarterback sacks. | | | | | | |
| **Jake Ketschek** | OL | 6-4 | 310 | ✪✪✪ | Absecon, NJ | St. Augustine Prep |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 28 player in New Jersey… Missed final month of 2020 season due to injury. | | | | | | |
| **Devin Lee** | DL | 6-3 | 275 | ✪✪✪ | McDonough, GA | Ola |
| Ranked No. 44 defensive tackle nationally by 247Sports.com… As a senior, had 58 tackles, including 12 tackles for loss, and nine quarterback sacks… Had 53 tackles, including 26 tackles for loss, and 17 quarterback sacks as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Ezra McAllister** | WR | 6-0 | 175 | ✪✪✪ | Marshall, MI | Marshall |
| Had 124 career receptions for 1,498 yards and 32 touchdowns… Had 56 receptions for 712 yards and 11 touchdowns as a junior… Had 43 tackles, including 5.5 tackles for loss, seven quarterback sacks, one interception and four fumbles caused. | | | | | | |

| Name | Pos. | Ht. | Wt. | Stars | Hometown | School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Michael Mincey** | LB | 6-1 | 220 | ✪✪✪ | Waycross, GA | Ware County |
| 247Sports rated No. 44 inside linebacker nationally… As a junior, helped team to 8-4 record and state playoffs… Had 88 tackles, including 12 tackles for loss, three quarterback sacks and two fumbles caused as a sophomore. | | | | | | |
| **Gage Pitchford** | OL | 6-6 | 295 | ✪✪✪ | Newnan, GA | East Coweta |
| Helped offense average 32.1 points per game and 5.4 yards per rush as a senior. | | | | | | |
| **Tyson Russell** | DB | 5-11 | 175 | ✪✪✪ | Plantation, FL | St. Thomas Aquinas |
| As a senior, helped team to 7-1 record and state championship… Helped team to 15-0 record and state championship as a junior. | | | | | | |
| **Marlen Sewell** | DB | 6-1 | 180 | ✪✪✪ | Birmingham, AL | Shades Valley |
| Helped team to playoff appearance in 2020. | | | | | | |
| **Quincy Skinner, Jr.** | WR | 6-1 | 185 | ✪✪✪ | Pompano Beach, FL | St. Thomas Aquinas |
| Helped team to 7-1 record and state championship as a senior… As a junior, had six receptions for 81 yards and helped team to 15-0 record and state championship. | | | | | | |
| **Patrick Smith** | RB | 5-10 | 185 | ✪✪✪ | Absecon, NJ | Holy Spirit |
| As a senior, scored 16 touchdowns and helped team to 8-0 record… Had 1,338 yards rushing and 19 touchdowns as a junior… Had eight receptions for 110 yards… Scored two kickoff return touchdowns and three two-point conversions. | | | | | | |
| **Terion Sugick** | DL | 6-2 | 305 | ✪✪✪ | Landover, MD | Rock Creek Christian Academy |
| 247Sports.com rated No. 53 defensive tackle nationally and No. 22 player in Maryland… Team did not play in fall of 2020. | | | | | | |
| **CJ Taylor** | DB | 6-1 | 195 | ✪✪✪ | McMinnville | Warren County |
| Ranked No. 35 player in Tennessee by 247Sports.com… Had 2,989 career rushing yards and 41 touchdowns… Had 796 career passing yards, 115 receiving yards, 142 kickoff return yards, 368 punt return yards, 174 tackles, six interceptions and two quarterback sacks… As a senior, had 57 tackles, including four tackles for loss, two quarterback sacks and three interceptions. | | | | | | |
| **Errington Truesdell** | LB | 6-1 | 215 | ✪✪✪ | Duluth, GA | Woodward Academy |
| Had 107 tackles, including 14 tackles for loss, five quarterback sacks, three interceptions and one fumble recovered as a senior… As a junior, had 95 tackles, including nine tackles for loss, two quarterback sacks, two interceptions and two fumbles recovered. | | | | | | |
| **Oyenmwen Uzebu** | OL | 6-6 | 305 | ✪✪✪ | Atlanta, GA | West Virginia |
| Played in two games during 2019 season… As a high school senior, anchored offensive line that had 2,062 yards rushing and 2,590 yards passing. | | | | | | |
| **Alan Wright** | DB | 5-11 | 180 | ✪✪✪ | Fayetteville, GA | Woodward Academy |
| Had 30 tackles, including four tackles for loss, four interceptions, returning one for touchdown, nine passes broken up and two fumbles recovered as a senior… Had 21 receptions for 191 yards and one touchdown… As a junior, helped team to 13-1 record and state championship game… Had 36 tackles, six interceptions and three passes broken up. | | | | | | |
| **James Ziglor, III** | DB | 6-0 | 190 | ✪✪✪ | Marietta, GA | Harrison |
| As a senior, had 1,058 yards and 12 touchdowns… Had 44 tackles and four passes broken up… Helped team to 15-0 record and state championship as a junior. | | | | | | |

# PLAYER PROFILE

## QB Seals Out to Prove He's the Real Deal

On Sept. 26, 2020, Vanderbilt's Ken Seals became just the third true freshman quarterback to start his team's first game since the league re-instituted freshman ability in 1972. It seemed like just another night to Seals until suddenly, as he warmed up, it didn't.

"Your eyes kind of get lost in the stands a little bit, just the pure size of — I had been to Kyle Field before but never in the *middle* of the field, especially about to play a football game," Seals said with a laugh. "So I think it was at that moment I was like, 'Wow, can I do this?'"

Seals, who prepped three hours away at Texas' Weatherford High, hit 20 of 29 passes for 150 yards and a touchdown. He also threw two interceptions as the Commodores just missed an upset, losing 17-12.

Five games later, Seals threw for 336 yards — but also three interceptions — as the Commodores just missed another upset at Mississippi State. His talent was obvious, but he took no solace in moral victories.

"I think about two games — Texas A&M and Mississippi State — and those were the two games where I walked away feeling like I let my teammates down. … I let it bother me, but I tried not to let those things carry on into the next week."

That attitude made Seals a natural leader for a team that lacked one.

"I had older players — receivers and a couple of linemen — come to me and say, 'Listen, this is what we need. We need someone who's going to tell us when we're screwing up, someone who's going to take command of the huddle. … Don't think that just because you're coming in here your first year as a freshman, that you can't demand more of us or have high expectations and hold us accountable, because that's what we need,'" Seals said.

Seals spent the offseason looking for role models on how to be a better leader. He found one in Vanderbilt baseball coach Tim Corbin, whom he approached for advice over the winter.

QB KEN SEALS

Photo by Joe Robbins

"It kind of came from the idea of wanting to surround myself with people that have a winning personality, that are used to winning," Seals said.

"I reached out to Coach Corbin and wanted to talk to him and pick his brain, listen to him talk, see how he thinks and processes information. The way that he perceives things … is something that I want to instill in my game and in my mentality."

For more coverage visit lindyssports.com/college-football/sec/vanderbilt

# BEST AND BRIGHTEST

## MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

### QB KEN SEALS

Started all nine games as a true freshman. … Had a four-game mid-season stretch against Ole Miss, Mississippi State, Kentucky and Florida in which he hit 105 of 152 passes for 1,199 yards, seven touchdowns and five interceptions. … Set a Vanderbilt freshman record with 1,928 passing yards. … Had three 300-yard passing games — with a high of 336 against Mississippi State — and finished with 12 TDs and 10 interceptions.

## EMERGING STAR

### WR CHRIS PIERCE JR.

Transformed from a possession receiver with a low role in the offense to an important downfield playmaker as the season progressed. … At 6-4, 231 pounds, Pierce can be a load to bring down in the open field. … Had touchdown catches in four straight games vs. Ole Miss, Mississippi State, Kentucky and Florida. … Started eight games last season. … Had a 75-yard touchdown vs. Purdue in 2019.

## TOP NEWCOMER

### RE'MAHN DAVIS

Transferred from Temple in January and had a 46-yard touchdown run in the spring game. … Averaged 78 yards per game and 4.8 yards per carry as a freshman, earning Pro Football Focus Freshman All-American honors in 2019. … A physical, 5-9, 215-pounder who carried the ball at least 20 times in three of the four games he played in 2020. … Added 27 catches for 243 yards and two touchdowns at Temple.

# FLORIDA ATLANTIC | OWLS

C-USA rank: 5 Record: 5-4 C-USA record: 4-2 (2nd, East) Stadium: FAU Stadium (29,419)

RANKING 89

## OWLS at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Boca Raton, Fla.
**COACH:** Willie Taggart — At FAU: 5-4, 1 year; overall: 61-66, 11 years
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Michael Johnson Sr.
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Mike Stoops

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** 2018
**LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING:** 2014
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 20; 10 offense, 9 defense, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB Nick Tronti, RB James Charles, RB Johnny Ford, WR TJ Chase, LB Chase Lasater, CB Zyon Gilbert, FS Teja Young, BS Jordan Helm

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** The Owls have an experienced offensive line and look set at receiver. The defense loses all-conference LB Leighton McCarthy but is all set at other positions. Ford should give the offense a shot in the arm.
**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** The quarterback situation has potential but needs to be settled early. The defense had only seven interceptions in 2020 and needs to find a pass rusher with McCarthy's departure. If Leroy does return, that will be a huge plus for the defense.

**NICK TRONTI**
Photo by Frank Jansky/Icon Sportswire via AP Images

## OFFENSE

The Owls had subpar offensive numbers in 2020 when they averaged only 324.6 yards a game in total offense and a passing attack that ranked 117th (144.4 yards per outing). Their scoring average of 18.9 points was worst in the league, yet they won four of six conference games.

Bemoaning the lack of big plays, coach Willie Taggart changed offensive coordinators, bringing in Michael Johnson Sr., who coached with Taggart at Oregon and most recently was at Mississippi State in 2019.

His son, quarterback Michael Johnson Jr., transferred in from Penn State in December, and had a 56-yard completion to wide receiver Aaron Young in the spring game. For good measure, Taggart's son, Willie Taggart Jr., connected with new running back Johnny Ford for a 75-yard completion.

During the spring, Johnson and Taggart were in a four-way competition with veterans Nick Tronti and Javion Posey for the starting quarterback job ... and then after spring practice ended, former Miami QB N'Kosi Perry announced he was immediately transferring to FAU, too. Perry, it should be noted, threw four touchdown passes in beating Taggart's Florida State team, 28-27, in 2018.

The Owls return nine other starters, including running back James Charles (a team-best 429 rushing yards) and receivers TJ Chase (23 receptions for 218 yards), Jordan Merrell (18-218), and Brandon Robinson (12-145). The entire starting offensive line returns.

FAU will be looking for a spot for Ford, who also was effective as a slot receiver in three seasons at South Florida.

## DEFENSE

The Owls return a slew of starters from a solid defense that ranked 10th nationally in points allowed per game (17.4). Only linebacker Leighton McCarthy (league-leading nine sacks) is not returning.

Leading tackler Chase Lasater (72 stops), defensive end Jaylen Joyner (six sacks), and safety Teja Young (two interceptions) are among the defensive starters back. Linebackers Ahman Ross and Caliph Brice and safety Jordan Helm each recorded more than 50 tackles.

> "Sometimes for explosive plays you need explosive players. I think we have a couple of those guys."
> — Coach Willie Taggart

Ross, Brice, cornerback Zyon Gilbert and safety Teja Young received conference honorable mention recognition last year.

Taggart also anticipates the return of linebacker Akileis Leroy, who led the 2019 team in tackles (including 15.5 tackles for loss) before missing the 2020 season with academic issues. He could be back in time for fall camp.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Punter Matt Hayball and his 44.1-yard average is back, but kicker Vladimir Rivas (35 of 52 career field goal attempts) entered the transfer portal after the season, and kicking woes were evident in the spring game.

Ford (24.7-yard average on kickoff returns at USF in 2020) boosts the return game. Receiver LaJohntay Wester had 89 yards on 10 punt returns as a freshman.

## OVERVIEW

The Owls lost their last three games in 2020, including a 25-10 bowl setback to Memphis, but if they can sort out the quarterback situation and kick-start the offense, they will be competitive again in the C-USA East. The season opener at Florida will be huge challenge and could tell a lot about how far they have come.

## TOP NEWCOMER

**RB Johnny Ford**: Ford arrives after accounting for 1,937 all-purpose yards (1,175 rushing, 352 receiving, 396 on kickoff returns, and 14 on punt returns) in three seasons at South Florida. In seven games (two starts) for the Bulls last year, he rushed for 285 yards and caught 15 passes for 125 more. With his speed, he figures to be a big-play threat.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

### OFFENSE

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | 6 | **Nick Tronti*** | 6-2 | 210 | Jr. |
| RB | 28 | **James Charles*** | 5-10 | 190 | Sr. |
| WR | 8 | **TJ Chase*** | 6-1 | 185 | Sr. |
| WR | 47 | Logan Peterson | 6-3 | 230 | Jr. |
| WR | 81 | **Jordan Merrell*** | 5-9 | 200 | Jr. |
| WR | 89 | **Brandon Robinson*** | 6-4 | 200 | Jr. |
| LT | 75 | **Marquice Robinson*** | 6-3 | 305 | So. |
| LG | 53 | **Desmond Noel*** | 6-3 | 285 | Sr. |
| C | 63 | **Nick Weber*** | 6-3 | 295 | Jr. |
| RG | 64 | **Federico Maranges*** | 6-4 | 295 | Fr. |
| RT | 76 | **BJ Etienne*** | 6-3 | 310 | Jr. |

### DEFENSE

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | 52 | **Jaylen Joyner*** | 6-3 | 270 | So. |
| NG | 48 | **Evan Anderson*** | 6-3 | 355 | Fr. |
| DE | 94 | **Ryan Veingrad*** | 6-4 | 240 | Sr. |
| LB | 5 | **Ahman Ross*** | 5-11 | 200 | Jr. |
| LB | 25 | **Chase Lasater*** | 6-2 | 225 | Jr. |
| LB | 19 | **Caliph Brice*** | 6-2 | 210 | Sr. |
| LB | 58 | Eddie Williams | 6-1 | 189 | So. |
| CB | 12 | Diashun Moss | 5-10 | 175 | Sr. |
| CB | 24 | **Zyon Gilbert*** | 6-1 | 170 | Sr. |
| S | 32 | **Teja Young*** | 5-11 | 190 | So. |
| S | 35 | **Jordan Helm*** | 6-2 | 185 | Sr. |

### SPECIAL TEAMS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K | 38 | Morgan Suarez | 5-9 | 160 | Fr. |
| P | 42 | **Matt Hayball*** | 6-1 | 180 | So. |

*Returning starters in Bold

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | at Florida |
| Sept. 11 | GEORGIA SOUTHERN |
| Sept. 18 | FORDHAM |
| Sept. 25 | at Air Force |
| Oct. 2 | FIU |
| Oct. 9 | at UAB |
| Oct. 23 | at Charlotte |
| Oct. 30 | UTEP |
| Nov. 6 | MARSHALL |
| Nov. 13 | at Old Dominion |
| Nov. 20 | at Western Kentucky |
| Nov. 27 | MIDDLE TENNESSEE |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | SOUTH FLORIDA | CAN |
| W | CHARLOTTE | 21-17 |
| L | at Marshall | 9-20 |
| W | UTSA | 24-3 |
| W | WESTERN KENTUCKY | 10-6 |
| W | at FIU | 38-19 |
| W | UMASS | 24-2 |
| | OLD DOMINION | CAN |
| | at Middle Tennessee | CAN |
| L | at Georgia Southern | 3-20 |
| L | at Southern Miss | 31-45 |
| | **MONTGOMERY BOWL** | |
| L | vs. Memphis | 10-25 |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 18.9 | 115 |
| Rushing | 180.1 | 48 |
| Passing | 144.4 | 117 |
| Total | 324.6 | 112 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 17.4 | 10 |
| Rushing | 154.6 | 51 |
| Passing | 187.7 | 16 |
| Total | 342.3 | 24 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 0 | + 0.00 | T-60 |

# FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL | PANTHERS

C-USA rank: 9 | Record: 0-5 | C-USA record: 0-3 (7th, East) | Stadium: Riccardo Silva Stadium (20,000)

**RANKING 113**

## PANTHERS at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Miami
**COACH:** Butch Davis — At FIU: 51-20, 6 years; overall: 102-64, 14 years
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Andrew Breiner
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Everett Withers

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** 2010, Sun Belt
**LAST BOWL:** 2019, Camellia
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 14; 5 offense, 7 defense, kicker, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB Max Bortenschlager, RB D'vonte Price, WR Shemar Thornton, DE Devon Strickland, LB Jamal Gates, CB Rishard Dames, S Richard Dames

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** The Panthers have some playmakers at running back and receiver. The secondary is a salty bunch as well. The starter at quarterback may be undecided, but all three candidates have their strong points.
**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** How much improvement the defense can make against the run is a critical issue. The offensive line also has a couple of key spots to fill.

## OFFENSE

Quarterback remains an issue for FIU, which had three different starters at the position in 2020's five-game season.

Neither Max Bortenschlager nor Kaylan Wiggins managed to complete more than half of their pass attempts. Bortenschlager, a transfer from Maryland, went 25 of 52 for 252 yards in five appearances (two starts), and Wiggins was 22 of 48 for 284 yards in three games (one start).

They are facing a push from Haden Carlson, who didn't play as a freshman. Stone Norton (two starts) transferred.

Whoever emerges will have a couple of experienced receivers as potential targets. Bryce Singleton led the Panthers with 14 catches for 150 yards in his five games, and Nate Jefferson recorded six receptions for 68 yards. After missing 2020 to injury, Shemar Thornton looks to reclaim the starting spot he had in 2019, when he led FIU with 51 receptions.

Newcomer Tyrese Chambers will challenge for a starting spot. The transfer from Sacred Heart was a 2019 finalist for the Jerry Rice Award, given to the top freshman at the FCS level.

Veteran D'vonte Price heads a solid stable of running backs after rushing for 581 yards (6.8 per carry). Kejon Owens, E.J. Wilson and redshirt freshman Lexington Joseph were in the rotation in the spring. Shaun Peterson, last year's second-leading rusher (188 yards in three games, one start), missed spring drills.

Sterling Palmer is firmly established at tight end. Guard Sione Finau and tackle Lyndell Hudson started all five of FIU's games, and several other linemen recorded starts in 2020.

## DEFENSE

Improving the run defense will be a priority for coordinator Everett Withers, who is in his first season at FIU, as is his counterpart on offense, Andrew Breiner. That four members of the secondary led the team in tackles probably says all that's needed about the Panthers' problems stopping the run.

The Panthers yielded an average of 235.6 yards per game to opposing rushers, and only two opponents (Middle Tennessee with 136 and Western Kentucky with 157) failed to reach the 200-yard mark. Florida Atlantic ran for 381 yards.

The top five tacklers return, led by twin defensive backs Richard (35 stops) and Rishard Dames (26). Linebacker Jamal Gates and defensive backs Josh Turner and Dorian Hall had 26, 25 and 24 stops, respectively.

Jason Mercier (19 tackles in four games), Kevin Oliver (15) and Davon Strickland (three sacks) are returning starters up front, but junior Rashad Colson grabbed Mercier's spot coming out of spring.

**D'VONTE PRICE**
Photo by Jonathan Huff/CSM via ZUMA Wire via AP Images

"We have a very experienced and accomplished group of running backs that I am excited to work with."
— Offensive coordinator Andrew Breiner

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Kicker Chase Gabriel and punter Tom Heatherly return. Gabriel made three of four field-goal attempts, while Heatherly averaged 44.4 yards on 32 boots. Singleton (punts) and Joseph (a 100-yard kickoff return in 2020) are the primary return men.

## OVERVIEW

Steady quarterback play and an improved run defense could lead to a return to the postseason for the Panthers. Aside from a September 18 trip to Texas Tech, the early schedule looks manageable. That could help get them ready for a challenging October.

## TOP NEWCOMER

**WR Tyrese Chambers:** The speedy Chambers played one season at Sacred Heart, an FCS school, and he made the most of it. He was a finalist for the Jerry Rice Award that goes to the top freshman at the FCS level after catching 50 passes for 811 yards and 10 touchdowns in the 2019 campaign.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

### OFFENSE

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | 12 | Max Bortenschlager | 6-3 | 205 | Sr. |
| **RB** | **24** | **D'vonte Price*** | **6-2** | **215** | **Sr.** |
| WR | 0 | Tyrese Chambers | 6-1 | 185 | So. |
| WR | 1 | Shemar Thornton | 5-11 | 182 | Sr. |
| **WR** | **2** | **Bryce Singleton*** | **5-11** | **193** | **Jr.** |
| **TE** | **88** | **Sterling Palmer*** | **6-6** | **235** | **Jr.** |
| LT | 70 | Miles Frazier | 6-5 | 304 | Fr. |
| **LG** | **72** | **Sione Finau*** | **6-3** | **300** | **So.** |
| C | 65 | Julius Pierce | 6-5 | 265 | Fr. |
| RG | 51 | Dontae Keys | 6-4 | 300 | Sr. |
| **RT** | **77** | **Lyndell Hudson Jr.*** | **6-6** | **300** | **So.** |

### DEFENSE

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | 53 | Tevin Jones | 6-4 | 220 | Jr. |
| DT | 75 | Rashad Colson | 6-5 | 310 | Jr. |
| **DT** | **99** | **Davon Strickland*** | **6-1** | **263** | **So.** |
| **DE** | **5** | **Kevin Oliver*** | **6-4** | **263** | **Sr.** |
| LB | 10 | Daniel Jackson | 6-2 | 228 | Sr. |
| **LB** | **9** | **Jamal Gates*** | **6-2** | **225** | **Sr.** |
| LB | 11 | Josh Powell | 5-11 | 194 | Sr. |
| **CB** | **4** | **Rishard Dames*** | **5-11** | **175** | **Jr.** |
| **CB** | **7** | **Josh Turner*** | **6-0** | **188** | **Jr.** |
| **S** | **0** | **Dorian Hall*** | **6-4** | **190** | **Jr.** |
| **S** | **3** | **Richard Dames*** | **5-11** | **185** | **Sr.** |

### SPECIAL TEAMS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **K** | **37** | **Chase Gabriel*** | **5-11** | **180** | **Fr.** |
| **P** | **1** | **Tommy Heatherly*** | **5-11** | **210** | **Sr.** |

*Returning starters in Bold

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 2 | LONG ISLAND |
| Sept. 11 | TEXAS STATE |
| Sept. 18 | at Texas Tech |
| Sept. 25 | at Central Michigan |
| Oct. 2 | at FAU |
| Oct. 9 | CHARLOTTE |
| Oct. 23 | WESTERN KENTUCKY |
| Oct. 30 | at Marshall |
| Nov. 6 | OLD DOMINION |
| Nov. 13 | at Middle Tennessee |
| Nov. 20 | NORTH TEXAS |
| Nov. 27 | at Southern Miss |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| L | at Liberty | 34-36 |
| L | MIDDLE TENNESSEE | 28-31 |
| L | JACKSONVILLE STATE | 10-19 |
| | at UTEP | CAN |
| L | FLORIDA ATLANTIC | 19-38 |
| L | at Western Kentucky | 21-38 |
| | LOUISIANA TECH | CAN |
| | at Charlotte | CAN |
| | MARSHALL | CAN |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 22.4 | 105 |
| Rushing | 157.4 | 71 |
| Passing | 123.4 | 121 |
| Total | 280.8 | 122 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 32.4 | 87 |
| Rushing | 235.6 | 117 |
| Passing | 187.2 | 15 |
| Total | 422.8 | 79 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 1 | - 0.20 | T-74 |

# FLORIDA STATE | SEMINOLES

ACC rank: 8 | Record: 3-6 | ACC record: 2-6 (13th) | Stadium: Doak Campbell Stadium (79,560)

RANKING 51

## SEMINOLES at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Tallahassee, Fla.
**COACH:** Mike Norvell — At FSU: 3-6, 1 year; overall: 41-22, 5 years
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Kenny Dillingham
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Adam Fuller

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** 2014
**LAST BOWL:** 2019, Sun
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 14; 7 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB McKenzie Milton, RB Jashaun Corbin, WR Malik McClain, RT Robert Scott, DE Jermaine Johnson, LB Amari Gainer, CB Jarvis Brownlee Jr., CB Brandon Moore, NB Jammie Robinson

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** Milton's precision, work ethic and confidence will be a huge boost, and FSU should be able to run. Norvell found five players in the transfer portal who could make an impact on defense. Johnson is the edge rusher FSU has been missing, and the secondary is loaded.
**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** Drops and shaky pass protection were major issues in 2020 and often flared up again in the spring. Aside from Johnson, who else can pressure the quarterback? There's little depth at linebacker.

**MCKENZIE MILTON**
Photo by Melina Myers-USA TODAY Sports

### OFFENSE

Florida State showed significant improvement in the run game, averaging 200 yards in Year 1 under coach Mike Norvell. But an inconsistent passing game — with four different starting quarterbacks, shaky pass protection and drops — limited the Seminoles' ability to build drives and score points.

Newcomer McKenzie Milton won't solve all of the problems, but he showed in spring workouts he is more than an inspirational leader. Milton threw for 8,683 yards, with 72 TDs and 22 interceptions from 2016 to 2018 at UCF before suffering a brutal knee injury that required nine surgeries. At FSU, his mobility was not a question and some of his best practices came toward the end of spring.

FSU spent the spring seeking freshmen to emerge alongside Ontaria Wilson (30 receptions, 382 yards, 2 TDs) in three-receiver sets. Early enrollees Malik McClain and Joshua Burrell, as well as redshirt freshman Kentron Poitier, are all 6-2 or taller and could earn starting spots.

Jashaun Corbin has emerged as FSU's most consistent back, while Lawrance Toafili is an elusive receiver out of the backfield. The offensive line, led by guard Devontay Love-Taylor and tackle Robert Scott Jr., made strides in run blocking, but still allowed 29 sacks in nine games.

### DEFENSE

The second year in coordinator Adam Fuller's 4-2-5 will surely find improvement after allowing 36 points a game.

Georgia transfer Jermaine Johnson was the star of the spring, showing speed and physicality at defensive end. An FSU defense that had just nine sacks in nine games sorely needs Johnson, who had five sacks in seven games with the Bulldogs last fall. Keir Thomas started 32 games at South Carolina before transferring and could start at the other end.

Depth has developed at tackle, where Dennis Briggs Jr., Robert Cooper and Fabien Lovett are among the linemen who will rotate.

> "I knew he had some top-end, pass-rush ability, but his physical presence in the run game was impressive."
> — DE coach John Papuchis on Jermaine Johnson

Versatile Amari Gainer, Emmett Rice and Stephen Dix Jr. seemed to improve each week in the two linebackers spots last year; that needs to continue.

The corner options are plentiful: Jarvis Brownlee Jr., Jarrian Jones, Brandon Moore, Jarques McClellion, Akeem Dent and Meiko Dotson are in the mix. It's the same at safety with Jammie Robinson (who stood out at nickel), Renardo Green, Travis Jay, Sidney Williams and Brendan Gant.

### SPECIAL TEAMS

Punter Alex Mastromanno averaged 43.5 yards, impressive for a true freshman. The Seminoles must find some consistency in the kicking game: Ryan Fitzgerald and Parker Grothaus each were 4 of 7 on field-goal attempts. Safety Travis Jay (22.9 yards per kick return) is a playmaker.

### OVERVIEW

The pandemic impacted first-year coaches more than others. Norvell had just three 2020 spring practices, and the strength staff lost months away from athletes. The lost offseason time was evident throughout the fall as the Seminoles went 3-6.

Norvell often speaks of "the climb," and it's reasonable to expect the Seminoles to take a step up the ACC mountain in Year 2. But don't expect a giant leap against a schedule that features Clemson, Notre Dame, Florida, North Carolina and Miami.

### TOP NEWCOMER

**WR Malik McClain**: Inconsistent play and drops at receiver resulted in a wide-open search for receiving help in the spring. McClain is a 6-foot-4 early enrollee who doesn't look like a freshman and could be a focal point of the Seminoles' 2021 offense.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

**OFFENSE**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | 10 | McKenzie Milton | 5-11 | 192 | Sr. |
| RB | 0 | **Jashaun Corbin*** | **6-0** | **215** | **So.** |
| WR | 80 | **Ontaria Wilson*** | **6-0** | **173** | **Jr.** |
| WR | 6 | Keyshawn Helton | 5-9 | 175 | Jr. |
| WR | 11 | Malik McClain | 6-4 | 195 | Fr. |
| TE | 4 | Jordan Wilson | 6-4 | 262 | Sr. |
| LT | 76 | **Darius Washington*** | **6-4** | **291** | **Fr.** |
| LG | 55 | **Dontae Lucas*** | **6-3** | **324** | **So.** |
| C | 53 | **Maurice Smith*** | **6-3** | **277** | **Fr.** |
| RG | 58 | **Devontay Love-Taylor*** | **6-4** | **312** | **Sr.** |
| RT | 52 | **Robert Scott Jr.*** | **6-5** | **311** | **Fr.** |

**DEFENSE**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | 11 | Jermaine Johnson | 6-5 | 260 | Sr. |
| DT | 6 | Dennis Briggs Jr. | 6-4 | 279 | So. |
| DT | 91 | **Robert Cooper*** | **6-2** | **335** | **Jr.** |
| DE | 4 | Keir Thomas | 6-2 | 275 | Sr. |
| LB | 33 | **Amari Gainer*** | **6-3** | **232** | **So.** |
| LB | 1 | **Emmett Rice*** | **6-2** | **227** | **Sr.** |
| NB | 10 | Jammie Robinson | 5-11 | 199 | So. |
| CB | 3 | **Jarvis Brownlee Jr.*** | **5-11** | **179** | **Fr.** |
| CB | 13 | Brandon Moore | 6-0 | 181 | Sr. |
| S | 8 | **Renardo Green*** | **6-0** | **188** | **So.** |
| S | 18 | Travis Jay | 6-2 | 195 | Fr. |

**SPECIAL TEAMS**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K | 88 | **Ryan Fitzgerald*** | **6-1** | **189** | **Fr.** |
| P | 49 | **Alex Mastromanno*** | **6-1** | **214** | **Fr.** |

***Returning starters in Bold**

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 5 | NOTRE DAME |
| Sept. 11 | JACKSONVILLE STATE |
| Sept. 18 | at Wake Forest |
| Sept. 25 | LOUISVILLE |
| Oct. 02 | SYRACUSE |
| Oct. 09 | at North Carolina |
| Oct. 23 | MASSACHUSETTS |
| Oct. 30 | at Clemson |
| Nov. 06 | NC STATE |
| Nov. 13 | MIAMI |
| Nov. 20 | at Boston College |
| Nov. 27 | at Florida |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| L | GEORGIA TECH | 13-16 |
| L | at Miami | 10-52 |
| W | JACKSONVILLE STATE | 41-24 |
| L | at Notre Dame | 26-42 |
| W | NORTH CAROLINA | 31-28 |
| L | at Louisville | 16-48 |
| L | PITTSBURGH | 17-41 |
| L | at NC State | 22-38 |
| W | DUKE | 56-35 |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 25.8 | 85 |
| Rushing | 199.9 | 31 |
| Passing | 196.8 | 98 |
| Total | 396.7 | 62 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 36.0 | 105 |
| Rushing | 199.2 | 97 |
| Passing | 257.1 | 98 |
| Total | 456.3 | 107 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 3 | - 0.33 | T-88 |

# GEORGIA SOUTHERN | EAGLES

Sun Belt rank: 7 Record: 8-5 Sun Belt: 4-4 (T-3rd, East) Stadium: Allen E. Paulson Stadium (25,000)

RANKING 108

## EAGLES at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Statesboro, Ga.
**COACH:** Chad Lunsford: At Georgia Southern and overall: 27-18, 4 years
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Doug Ruse
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Scot Sloan

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** 2014
**LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING:** 2017
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 15; 7 offense, 6 defense, kicker, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB Justin Tomlin, RB J.D. King, RB Logan Wright, WR/RET NaJee Thompson, OL Brian Miller, NT C.J. Wright, LB Randy Wade Jr., CB Derrick Canteen
**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** Because of scheme and talent, the Eagles should have one of the top rushing teams in the country. With a veteran offensive line and top tier running backs receiving lots of carries in the option attack, the Eagles' should control the ground and time of possession.
**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** A rotating crop of safeties and secondary players has caused Georgia Southern to be susceptible to the aerial attack in the past two seasons. It could wind up being a cause for concern once again in 2021.

**J.D. KING**
Photo by Steve Beyer

## OFFENSE

Georgia Southern made a change at offensive coordinator midway through last season, going with Doug Ruse as an interim after Bob DeBesse was let go amidst his third season calling plays in Statesboro.

Ruse earned the full-time position and will be relying on Justin Tomlin, who is replacing four-year starting quarterback Shai Werts.

The Eagles figure to still lean heavily on their option-based running game, and it's a benefit that Tomlin started twice last season as an injury replacement. He has completed 23 of 51 career passes, while running 69 times for 392 yards.

"This offseason, I think we've really seen the real Justin Tomlin as far as how he prepares as 'that guy' at quarterback," said coach Chad Lunsford.

Georgia Southern, which averaged 27.2 points per game in 2020, returns running backs J.D. King and Logan Wright and a veteran offensive line. King rushed 116 times for 625 yards in seven games, while Wright averaged 6.1 yards per carry on 99 attempts. Expect Tulane transfer Amare Jones, an all-purpose threat, to be a factor at some point in the backfield, and potentially in the return game.

The tight end trio of Beau Johnson, D.J. Butler and Sean Pelkisson should be threats in the passing game.

Wide receivers Khaleb Hood (15 catches for 224 yards) and NaJee Thompson provide big-play potential on the outside.

## DEFENSE

Coordinator Scot Sloan's defense finished in the top three of the Sun Belt for scoring defense for a third straight year in 2020. The Eagles were first in the league in rushing defense and total defense.

Senior nose tackle C.J. Wright (39 tackles, 5.5 for loss, last season) anchors the defensive line. The linebacker unit will be filled with seniors like Todd Bradley-Glenn, Tre Allen, Benz Josue and Randy Wade Jr.

Justin Birdsong and Anthony Wilson will begin fall camp as the starting safeties while redshirt sophomore Derrick Canteen has All-Sun Belt talent.

> "Last year when he played against Florida Atlantic and App State, I think he won over a lot of our guys. They are behind him and I think he knows that now."
> — Coach Chad Lunsford on QB Justin Tomlin

He picked off six passes last season and finished with 10 pass breakups.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Alex Raynor (18 of 25 field goal attempts, long of 47 yards in 2020) is the frontrunner for kicking duties, but he'll need to hold off incoming freshman Britton Williams in fall camp. Anthony Beck II averaged 41.8 yards per punt last season and should be one of the best in the Sun Belt.

## OVERVIEW

Georgia Southern played 13 football games in 2020, an accomplishment unto itself amid the pandemic. The Eagles finished strong with a New Orleans Bowl victory — improving to 3-0 in bowl games all-time — and the 2021 roster will feature, for the most part, players recruited by Lunsford, who took over midway in the 2017 season.

It's always tough replacing a quarterback like Werts (now a wide receiver for Louisville), but Tomlin has plenty of experience to direct the option offense under Ruse's guidance. With a veteran offensive line and all-conference caliber running backs, Georgia Southern should again contend for a bowl game.

## TOP NEWCOMER

**WR Derwin Burgess Jr.**: A one-time University of South Carolina commit, Burgess was impressive as an early enrollee in spring camp. The speedster made a quick impression on offensive coordinator Doug Ruse. "He's a great athlete and is very smart. He has picked things up very fast," Ruse said of the true freshman. "We find something just about every day that excites us about his future."

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

### OFFENSE

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | 17 | Justin Tomlin | 5-11 | 190 | Jr. |
| **RB** | **2** | **Logan Wright*** | **6-0** | **225** | **Sr.** |
| WR | 24 | Jjay Mcafee | 6-3 | 215 | Jr. |
| WR | 6 | NaJee Thompson | 5-11 | 200 | Sr. |
| SLOT | 7 | Khaleb Hood | 5-10 | 170 | Jr. |
| **TE** | **11** | **Beau Johnson*** | **6-1** | **225** | **So.** |
| **LT** | **56** | **Brian Miller*** | **6-3** | **300** | **Sr.** |
| **LG** | **51** | **Aaron Dowdell*** | **6-4** | **305** | **Sr.** |
| **C** | **66** | **Logan Langemeier*** | **6-4** | **285** | **Sr.** |
| **RG** | **72** | **Khalil Crowder*** | **6-1** | **310** | **Jr.** |
| **RT** | **50** | **Caleb Kelly*** | **6-2** | **295** | **Sr.** |

### DEFENSE

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **DE** | **42** | **Dillon Springer*** | **6-1** | **250** | **Sr.** |
| **NT** | **94** | **C.J. Wright*** | **6-0** | **290** | **Sr.** |
| DE | 44 | Justin Ellis | 6-2 | 250 | Sr. |
| LB | 5 | Benz Josue | 6-0 | 210 | Sr. |
| LB | 43 | Tre Allen | 6-1 | 235 | Sr. |
| LB | 11 | Todd Bradley-Glenn | 6-0 | 225 | Sr. |
| **DOG** | **47** | **Randy Wade Jr.*** | **6-2** | **275** | **Sr.** |
| **CB** | **13** | **Derrick Canteen*** | **5-11** | **185** | **So.** |
| **CB** | **14** | **Darrell Baker Jr.*** | **6-1** | **195** | **Sr.** |
| **SS** | **12** | **Anthony Wilson*** | **5-10** | **190** | **So.** |
| FS | 18 | Justin Birdsong | 5-11 | 180 | Sr. |

### SPECIAL TEAMS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **K** | **99** | **Alex Raynor*** | **5-11** | **175** | **So.** |
| **P** | **7** | **Anthony Beck II*** | **6-4** | **225** | **Jr.** |

*Returning starters in Bold

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | GARDNER-WEBB |
| Sept. 11 | at FAU |
| Sept. 18 | at Arkansas |
| Sept. 25 | LOUISIANA |
| Oct. 2 | ARKANSAS STATE |
| Oct. 9 | at Troy |
| Oct. 14 | at South Alabama |
| Oct. 30 | GEORGIA STATE |
| Nov. 6 | COASTAL CAROLINA |
| Nov. 13 | at Texas State |
| Nov. 20 | BRIGHAM YOUNG |
| Nov. 27 | at Appalachian State |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| W | CAMPBELL | 27-26 |
| L | at Louisiana | 18-20 |
| W | at Louisiana Monroe | 35-30 |
| W | UMASS | 41-0 |
| L | at Coastal Carolina | 14-28 |
| W | SOUTH ALABAMA | 24-17 |
| W | TROY | 20-13 |
| W | TEXAS STATE | 40-38 |
| L | at Army | 27-28 |
| L | at Georgia State | 24-30 |
| W | FAU | 20-3 |
| L | APPALACHIAN STATE | 26-34 |
| | **NEW ORLEANS BOWL** | |
| W | vs. Louisiana Tech | 38-3 |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 27.2 | 72 |
| Rushing | 267.1 | 5 |
| Passing | 104.2 | 124 |
| Total | 371.2 | 84 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 20.8 | 23 |
| Rushing | 112.2 | 14 |
| Passing | 213.5 | 40 |
| Total | 325.7 | 14 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 9 | + 0.69 | 21 |

# GEORGIA STATE | PANTHERS

Sun Belt rank: 4 Record: 6-4 Sun Belt: 4-4 (T-3rd, East) Stadium: Georgia State Stadium (25,000)

RANKING 100

## PANTHERS at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Atlanta
**COACH:** Shawn Elliott — At Georgia State: 22-25, 4 years; overall: 23-30, 5 years
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Brad Glenn
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Nate Fuqua

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** None
**LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING:** 2018
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 21; 11 offense, 8 defense, kicker, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB Quad Brown, RB Destin Coates, WR Cornelious McCoy, WR Sam Pinckney, LB Blake Carroll, CB Quavian White, S Antavious Lane

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** Thanks to the COVID waiver that granted players an extra year of eligibility, the Panthers are in great shape when it comes to returning starters. Skill positions are solid. The OL has a combined career 136 starts. With the experience up front on defense, the run defense should pick up, and the secondary is solid.
**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** Finding a pass rusher to take over for Jordan Strachan (10.5 sacks) in 2020 is a priority on defense. The linebacking corps took a hit in lost starters.

DESTIN COATES
Photo by Michael Wade

"I feel very confident in all three of our quarterbacks."
— Coach Shawn Elliott, on returning starter Quad Brown and backups Darren Grainger and Mikele Colasurdo

## OFFENSE

Cornelious "Quad" Brown IV looks to build on a season in which he emerged from a four-way battle at quarterback in the preseason to finish as the Sun Belt's second-most productive passer with 2,278 yards in 10 games.

As a redshirt freshman he did have issues with turnovers, throwing 10 interceptions among his 178 attempts. He will have arguably the league's top receiving tandem in second-team All-Sun Belt Sam Pinckney and Cornelius McCoy, who has received at least honorable-mention all-conference recognition in each of the past three years.

Terrance Dixon also returns as a starting receiver, and tight end Roger Carter was a third-team all-conference honoree, catching 23 passes for 285 yards.

Running back is equally deep and talented. Destin Coates was the league's No. 3 rusher with an average of 85.4 yards per game, and Tucker Gregg had two of the team's longest runs from scrimmage (56 vs. Arkansas State, 48 vs. Appalachian State) on his way to 468 for the season.

Former South Carolina defensive back Jamyest Williams made a late-season switch to running back and finished with 253 yards on 27 carries, with eight catches for 73 yards.

Shamarious Gilmore, a first-team all-league selection in each of the past two years, heads an offensive line that returns all five starters.

## DEFENSE

Jordan Strachan's decision to leave Georgia State for South Carolina leaves a huge void. He had a national-best 10.5 sacks in 10 games in 2020 — about a third of the team total of 35.

The Panthers won't be completely without the ability to harass opposing passers. Defensive end Hardrick Willis, a second-team All-Sun Belt pick, was credited with six sacks, and Thomas Gore and Jeffery Clark combined for seven sacks.

The Panthers have three openings at linebacker with Strachan, Trajan Stephens-McQueen (62 tackles) and Victor Heyward departing, but leading tackler Blake Carroll (74 stops) returns at an inside spot in the 3-4 scheme.

Up front, Willis was a second-team All-Sun Belt pick at end. Dontae Wilson, a third-team selection, plays defensive end and nose guard. Akeem Smith and Jeffery Clark logged starts at nose guard and end, respectively.

The secondary is intact with Quavian White, a second-team All-Sun Belt pick, and three-year starter Jaylon Jones at the corners. Chris Moore, who transferred from Virginia, and Antavious Lane, a second-team all-conference pick as a redshirt freshman in 2020, man the safety spots.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Noel Ruiz transferred from North Carolina A&T last season and immediately won first-team all-conference honors after converting 13 of 16 field-goal attempts. Punter Michael Hayes averaged 40.4 yards on 50 attempts. White handles both punt and kickoff returns.

## OVERVIEW

The Panthers pushed West winner Louisiana to overtime before dropping a 34-31 decision, and they lost to perennial East contender Appalachian State only 17-13, so they potentially could contend in the Sun Belt East. Brown should be more comfortable in his second year as the starter. The schedule is brutal with non-conference outings at North Carolina and Auburn.

## TOP NEWCOMER

**LB Shamar McCollum**: McCollum, a graduate transfer, spent the past two years at Wake Forest, where he recorded 24 tackles with 6.5 for a loss in 18 appearances. He had only 10 stops in six games last season, but two of them went for losses. He could play linebacker or end up as a down lineman in the defensive front.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

**OFFENSE**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | 4 | **Cornelious Brown IV*** | 6-5 | 200 | So. |
| RB | 17 | **Destin Coates*** | 5-11 | 198 | Sr. |
| WR | 83 | **Cornelius McCoy*** | 5-11 | 185 | Sr. |
| WR | 15 | **Sam Pinckney*** | 6-4 | 210 | Jr. |
| WR | 0 | **Terrance Dixon*** | 5-7 | 170 | Jr. |
| TE | 5 | **Roger Carter*** | 6-2 | 250 | Sr. |
| LT | 73 | **Travis Glover*** | 6-6 | 330 | Jr. |
| LG | 75 | **Shamarious Gilmore*** | 6-3 | 295 | Sr. |
| C | 62 | **Malik Sumter*** | 6-1 | 295 | Sr. |
| RG | 64 | **Pat Bartlett*** | 6-4 | 295 | Sr. |
| RT | 77 | **Johnathan Bass*** | 6-4 | 290 | Jr. |

**DEFENSE**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | 90 | **Hardrick Willis*** | 6-3 | 244 | Sr. |
| NG | 97 | **Akeem Smith*** | 6-0 | 299 | Jr. |
| DE | 91 | **Jeffery Clark*** | 6-0 | 276 | So. |
| LB | 1 | Jontrey Hunter | 6-2 | 200 | Jr. |
| LB | 48 | Justin Abraham | 6-1 | 233 | Fr. |
| LB | 42 | **Blake Carroll*** | 6-1 | 230 | Sr. |
| LB | 47 | Jhi'Shawn Taylor | 6-3 | 211 | Sr. |
| CB | 20 | **Quavian White*** | 5-10 | 185 | Sr. |
| CB | 27 | **Jaylon Jones*** | 5-11 | 180 | Sr. |
| S | 34 | **Antavious Lane*** | 5-9 | 180 | Jr. |
| S | 28 | **Chris Moore*** | 6-0 | 210 | Sr. |

**SPECIAL TEAMS**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K | 92 | **Noel Ruiz*** | 5-11 | 187 | Sr. |
| P | 39 | **Michael Hayes*** | 5-9 | 181 | So. |

*Returning starters in Bold

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | ARMY |
| Sept. 11 | at North Carolina |
| Sept. 18 | CHARLOTTE |
| Sept. 25 | at Auburn |
| Oct. 2 | APPALACHIAN STATE |
| Oct. 9 | at Louisiana Monroe |
| Oct. 23 | TEXAS STATE |
| Oct. 30 | at Georgia Southern |
| Nov. 4 | at Louisiana |
| Nov. 13 | at Coastal Carolina |
| Nov. 20 | ARKANSAS STATE |
| Nov. 27 | TROY |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| L | LOUISIANA (OT) | 31-34 |
| | at Charlotte | CAN |
| W | EAST CAROLINA | 49-29 |
| L | at Arkansas State | 52-59 |
| W | at Troy | 36-34 |
| L | COASTAL CAROLINA | 0-51 |
| W | LOUISIANA MONROE | 52-34 |
| L | at Appalachian State | 13-17 |
| W | at South Alabama | 31-14 |
| W | GEORGIA SOUTHERN | 30-24 |
| | **LENDINGTREE BOWL** | |
| W | vs. Western Kentucky | 39-21 |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 33.3 | 32 |
| Rushing | 194.0 | 39 |
| Passing | 230.3 | 64 |
| Total | 424.3 | 40 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 31.7 | 79 |
| Rushing | 136.6 | 33 |
| Passing | 273.7 | 113 |
| Total | 410.3 | 70 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| +1 | +0.10 | 56 |

# GEORGIA TECH | YELLOW JACKETS

ACC rank: 12 | 2020 Record: 3-7 | ACC record: 3-6 (11th) | Stadium: Bobby Dodd Stadium (55,000)

**RANKING 78**

## YELLOW JACKETS at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Atlanta
**COACH:** Geoff Collins — At Georgia Tech: 6-16, 2 years; overall: 21-26, 4 years
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Dave Patenaude
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATORS:** Andrew Thacker, Nate Burton

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** 2009
**LAST BOWL:** 2018, Quick Lane
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 15; 6 offense, 9 defense

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB Jeff Sims, RB Jahmyr Gibbs, RB Jordan Mason, WR Kyric McGowan, DE Antonneous Clayton, LB Quez Jackson, S Tariq Carpenter, S Juanyeh Thomas

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** Georgia Tech has a deep backfield, improved offensive weapons and an offensive line that is capable of producing points. With depth at defensive end, Tech has the potential to become a formidable pass-rushing group. The secondary is experienced with four multi-year starters.

**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** Sims turned the ball over a lot last year with 13 interceptions and 12 fumbles, the second most in the FBS in 2020. Defensively, Tech is still thin at linebacker behind the starters.

**JEFF SIMS**
Photo by Ethan Hyman/The News & Observer via AP, Pool

## OFFENSE

Georgia Tech has a dynamic young offense led by two key players who are technically still freshmen.

Quarterback Jeff Sims is coming off one of the best freshman seasons for a signal-caller in Tech history, throwing for 1,881 yards and 13 touchdowns. He also threw 13 interceptions — but eight of those came in the first three games of the season.

He settled down after that and learned how to use his legs more (215 yards rushing in the last three games) and looks like a prime run-pass threat in 2021.

Fellow freshman Jahmyr Gibbs emerged as an electric running back before an injury cut short his season. He accounted for 763 yards of total offense in seven games as a valuable X-factor.

Tech is loaded at running back. Jordan Mason was third team All-ACC in 2019 before injuries slowed his 2020 season, and the Jackets also have talented Jamious Griffin and Dontae Smith.

Tech added Northwestern transfer Kyric McGowan as a combo receiver who can line up anywhere on the field. He joins the speedy Malachi Carter and sure-handed Adonicas Sanders as Tech returns four of its top six receivers.

The line will be retooled with the addition of Vanderbilt transfer Devin Cochran, who slides in at left tackle. Norfolk State transfer Kenneth Kirby joins in the summer as another potential contributor.

## DEFENSE

Finding a consistent pass rush has been a recent issue (21 sacks in 10 games last season), but Tech seems to have the right guys in place.

Jordan Domineck (team-leading four sacks), Antonneous Clayton, Sylvain Yondjouen, and freshmen Jared Ivey and Kyle Kennard are dynamic pass rushers at defensive end, and the Jackets added two transfers — Kevin Harris from Alabama and Keion White from Old Dominion — who can amp up the production.

Linebacker Quez Jackson will have a new running mate in Ayinde Eley, who had a big spring after transferring from Maryland.

> "He's really turning into just a guy out there that's no longer playing like a freshman. He's calm, cool and collected."
> — OL Ryan Johnson on QB Jeff Sims

Tech's 2020 defense was supposed to be led by upperclassmen Tariq Carpenter and Juanyeh Thomas, but both struggled. They looked better this spring and have NFL talent.

Corners Tre Swilling and Zamari Walton have the potential to be starters for the third straight season.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Georgia Tech had some of the worst kicking in the nation the past two seasons, making just six field goals on 16 attempts. Tennessee transfer Brent Cimaglia is a huge improvement as a grad transfer, having made 46 of 62 career field-goal tries.

Punting is now the concern. Ireland native David Shanahan, playing football for the first time, will replace Ray Guy Award winner Pressley Harvin III.

## OVERVIEW

Georgia Tech has finished near the bottom of the ACC for two seasons in a row. Expectations are much higher for this team due to experience and key transfers. The schedule remains tough, ending with games against Notre Dame and Georgia, along with a September trip to Clemson in the ACC division crossover. Being at least in the hunt for a bowl trip would be a sign of improvement.

## TOP NEWCOMER

**LT Devin Cochran**: The transfer from Vanderbilt was supposed to join the team in 2020, but opted to delay his enrollment. He gives the OL its first NFL-level LT in a long time, and he has been a stabilizing force on a rebuilding line while becoming a leader in the locker room.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

**OFFENSE**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | 10 | **Jeff Sims*** | 6-3 | 215 | Fr. |
| RB | 1 | **Jahmyr Gibbs*** | 5-11 | 200 | Fr. |
| WR | 7 | **Malachi Carter*** | 6-3 | 200 | Jr. |
| WR | 12 | Adonicas Sanders | 6-1 | 195 | Jr. |
| SL | 2 | Kyric McGowan | 5-11 | 205 | Sr. |
| TE | 83 | **Dylan Deveney*** | 6-6 | 258 | So. |
| LT | 77 | Devin Cochran | 6-7 | 320 | Sr. |
| LG | 60 | Paula Vaipulu | 6-3 | 305 | Fr. |
| C | 57 | **Mikey Minihan*** | 6-3 | 307 | Jr. |
| RG | 70 | **Ryan Johnson*** | 6-6 | 325 | Sr. |
| RT | 54 | Jordan Williams | 6-6 | 320 | Fr. |

**DEFENSE**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | 9 | Antonneous Clayton | 6-3 | 270 | Sr. |
| DT | 0 | **Djimon Brooks*** | 6-1 | 305 | Sr. |
| DT | 94 | **Mike Lockhart*** | 6-4 | 302 | Fr. |
| DE | 42 | **Jordan Domineck*** | 6-3 | 247 | So. |
| LB | 4 | **Quez Jackson*** | 6-1 | 225 | Jr. |
| LB | 10 | Ayinde Eley | 6-3 | 240 | Jr. |
| NB | 13 | **Wesley Walker*** | 6-1 | 202 | Fr. |
| CB | 3 | **Tre Swilling*** | 6-0 | 205 | Jr. |
| CB | 7 | **Zamari Walton*** | 6-3 | 187 | So. |
| S | 1 | **Juanyeh Thomas*** | 6-3 | 220 | Jr. |
| S | 2 | **Tariq Carpenter*** | 6-4 | 226 | Sr. |

**SPECIAL TEAMS**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K | 42 | Brent Cimaglia | 6-0 | 210 | Sr. |
| P | 82 | David Shanahan | 6-0 | 180 | Fr. |

*Returning starters in bold

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | NORTHERN ILLINOIS |
| Sept. 11 | KENNESAW STATE |
| Sept. 18 | at Clemson |
| Sept. 25 | NORTH CAROLINA |
| Oct. 2 | PITTSBURGH |
| Oct. 9 | at Duke |
| Oct. 23 | at Virginia |
| Oct. 30 | VIRGINIA TECH |
| Nov. 6 | at Miami |
| Nov. 13 | BOSTON COLLEGE |
| Nov. 20 | at Notre Dame |
| Nov. 27 | GEORGIA |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| W | at Florida State | 16-13 |
| L | UCF | 21-49 |
| L | at Syracuse | 20-37 |
| W | LOUISVILLE | 46-27 |
| L | CLEMSON | 7-73 |
| L | at Boston College | 27-48 |
| L | NOTRE DAME | 13-31 |
| W | DUKE | 56-33 |
| L | at NC State | 13-23 |
| L | PITTSBURGH | 20-34 |
| | at Miami | CAN |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 23.9 | 95 |
| Rushing | 190.8 | 43 |
| Passing | 199.1 | 93 |
| Total | 389.9 | 71 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 36.8 | 109 |
| Rushing | 189.2 | 90 |
| Passing | 270.1 | 111 |
| Total | 459.3 | 109 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 7 | - 0.70 | 111 |

# LOUISIANA | RAGIN' CAJUNS

Sun Belt rank: 2 Record: 10-1 Sun Belt record: 7-1 (1st, West) Stadium: Cajun Field (41,426)

RANKING 36

## RAGIN' CAJUNS at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Lafayette, La.
**COACH:** Billy Napier — At Louisiana and overall: 28-11, 3 years
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS:** Michael Desormeaux, Tim Leger
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Patrick Toney

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** 2020, Sun Belt co-champion
**LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING:** 2017
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 21; 10 offense, 9 defense, kicker, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB Levi Lewis, RB Chris Smith, WR Peter LeBlanc, DE Zi'Yon Hill, LB Lorenzo McCaskill, LB Ferrod Gardner, S Bralen Trahan

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** The Cajuns are loaded just about everywhere with one of the league's top quarterbacks, a big-play running back, and depth on an experienced offensive line and throughout a veteran defense.
**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** Injuries, of course, would be a concern, though the Cajuns were able to develop some depth at key spots like quarterback in the spring. LB Joe Dillon was a big-play guy on defense last year and is not returning.

## OFFENSE

With quarterback Levi Lewis back for his third season as the starter, Chris Smith eager to step up at running back, and a veteran receiving crew, Louisiana is poised for a fourth consecutive West Division title.

Lewis rushed for 335 yards and passed for 206.7 per game, putting him third in total offense per game (237.2) in the Sun Belt in 2020 and earning him second-team all-conference honors. He had 19 touchdown passes and only seven interceptions.

Smith rushed for 684 yards as the No. 3 running back behind All-Sun Belt running backs Elijah Mitchell and Trey Ragas, and he was a threat in the passing game, too, catching 16 passes for 170 yards and a score. He solidified his credentials with a strong spring showing.

Receivers Kyren Lacy (28 catches, 364 yards), Jalen Williams (20-360), Peter LeBlanc (23-334) and Errol Rogers Jr. (13-120) all started last year. Bullish tight end Johnny Lumpkin started nine games after missing 2019 to injury.

Five starters return up front, led by second-team All-Sun Belt performers O'Cyrus Torrence and Max Mitchell, and third-teamer Ken Marks.

In addition, T.J. Fiailoa transferred in after starting three seasons at Louisiana-Monroe. He bounced back after injuries cut short his 2019 season by starting all 10 games for the winless Warhawks in 2020.

## DEFENSE

Defensive end Zi'Yon Hill (second team), safety Brelan Trahan (second) and linebacker Lorenzo McCaskill (third) all earned all-conference honors and return to a defense that held opponents to 22.0 points and 355.4 yards a game.

McCaskill led the Cajuns in tackles with 83; Hill had four sacks; Trahan had four interceptions.

Nine starters return to the unit, and that doesn't include Trahan, who started only four games in sharing time at the safety spots with Percy Butler, Cameron Solomon and Kam Pedescleaux. Butler started nine games, Solomon five, and Pedescleaux four.

LEVI LEWIS
Photo by Michael Wade

"It's always good to have your quarterback back, but when it's a person like Levi, there's a compound effect there."
— Coach Billy Napier on QB Levi Lewis

Safety Ja'len Johnson and Pedescleaux shared time at the STAR position, a hybrid linebacker/safety spot, with Johnson earning nine starts. Johnson had five games with a least four tackles.

Along with McCaskill, Ferrod Gardner (74 tackles, 4.5 sacks) is a returning starter at linebacker, and Tayland Humphrey (32 tackles) and Andre Jones (43) return up front.

Eric Garror and Mekhi Garner, who each had three interceptions, fill out the secondary at the corners.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Kenneth Almendares converted all five of his field-goal attempts last year and seems to have the kicking job lined up after booting a 51-yarder to win the spring game for his team. Nate Snyder was inconsistent (5 of 10), but booted a 53-yarder as time ran out in the 20-18 win over Georgia Southern.

Rhys Byrns (43.5-yard average) is an all-conference punter. Chris Smith is an all-conference kick returner and also can handle punts.

## OVERVIEW

The Cajuns are huge favorites in the division race and look to have the opportunity to play for the conference title after being denied that chance when last year's league championship game was canceled.

## TOP NEWCOMER

**WR John Stephens Jr.**: A transfer from TCU, Stephens had 14 receptions in 25 career games for the Horned Frogs, but only one for 5 yards in five games (one start) in 2020 before he entered the transfer portal. He had 11 catches for 157 yards as a sophomore in 2019.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **OFFENSE** | | | | | |
| QB | 1 | **Levi Lewis*** | 5-10 | 184 | Sr. |
| RB | 21 | Chris Smith | 5-9 | 194 | So. |
| WR | 6 | **Errol Rogers Jr.*** | 5-11 | 187 | Fr. |
| WR | 18 | **Jalen Williams*** | 6-3 | 218 | Sr. |
| WR | 29 | **Peter LeBlanc*** | 6-2 | 190 | So. |
| TE | 88 | **Johnny Lumpkin*** | 6-6 | 260 | Jr. |
| LT | 74 | **Max Mitchell*** | 6-6 | 297 | Jr. |
| LG | 67 | **Ken Marks*** | 6-4 | 308 | Sr. |
| C | 64 | **Shane Vallot*** | 6-0 | 267 | Jr. |
| RG | 58 | **O'Cyrus Torrence*** | 6-5 | 332 | So. |
| RT | 65 | **Carlos Rubio*** | 6-4 | 296 | Jr. |
| **DEFENSE** | | | | | |
| DE | 4 | **Zi'Yon Hill*** | 6-1 | 283 | Jr. |
| NG | 99 | **Tayland Humphrey*** | 6-5 | 333 | Sr. |
| DE | 10 | **Andre Jones*** | 6-5 | 244 | Jr. |
| LB | 17 | Chauncey Manac | 6-3 | 251 | Sr. |
| LB | 2 | **Lorenzo McCaskill*** | 6-0 | 223 | Jr. |
| LB | 7 | **Ferrod Gardner*** | 6-1 | 220 | Sr. |
| LB/S | 28 | **Ja'len Johnson*** | 6-2 | 208 | Jr. |
| CB | 20 | **Mekhi Garner*** | 6-2 | 212 | So. |
| CB | 19 | **Eric Garror*** | 5-9 | 176 | Jr. |
| S | 9 | **Percy Butler*** | 6-0 | 190 | Jr. |
| S | 24 | Bralen Trahan | 6-0 | 191 | Jr. |
| **SPECIAL TEAMS** | | | | | |
| K | 45 | **Kenneth Almendares*** | 6-1 | 236 | So. |
| P | 47 | **Rhys Byrns*** | 6-0 | 186 | Jr. |

*Returning starters in Bold

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | at Texas |
| Sept. 11 | NICHOLLS STATE |
| Sept. 18 | OHIO |
| Sept. 25 | at Georgia Southern |
| Oct. 2 | at South Alabama |
| Oct. 12 | APPALACHIAN STATE |
| Oct. 21 | at Arkansas State |
| Oct. 30 | TEXAS STATE |
| Nov. 4 | GEORGIA STATE |
| Nov. 13 | at Troy |
| Nov. 20 | at Liberty |
| Nov. 27 | LOUISIANA-MONROE |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| W | at Iowa State | 31-14 |
| W | at Georgia State (OT) | 34-31 |
| W | GEORGIA SOUTHERN | 20-18 |
| L | COASTAL CAROLINA | 27-30 |
| W | at UAB | 24-20 |
| W | at Texas State | 44-34 |
| W | ARKANSAS STATE | 27-20 |
| W | SOUTH ALABAMA | 38-10 |
| | CENTRAL ARKANSAS | CAN |
| W | at Louisiana Monroe | 70-20 |
| W | at Appalachian State | 24-21 |
| **SUN BELT CHAMPIONSHIP GAME** | | |
| | at Coastal Carolina | CAN |
| **FIRST RESPONDERS BOWL** | | |
| W | vs. UTSA | 31-24 |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 33.6 | 29 |
| Rushing | 213.0 | 21 |
| Passing | 208.5 | 83 |
| Total | 421.5 | 43 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 22.0 | 31 |
| Rushing | 184.7 | 88 |
| Passing | 170.6 | 6 |
| Total | 355.4 | 33 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 10 | + 0.91 | T-13 |

# LOUISIANA-MONROE | WARHAWKS

Sun Belt rank: 10 Record: 0-10 Sun Belt record: 0-7 (5th, West) Stadium: Malone Stadium (30,427)

RANKING 126

## WARHAWKS at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Monroe, La.
**COACH:** Terry Bowden — At ULM: 1st year; overall: 82-69-1, 13 years
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Rich Rodriguez
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Zac Alley

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** 2005 Sun Belt co-champion
**LAST BOWL:** 2012, Independence
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 13; 5 offense, 8 defense

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB Rhett Rodriguez, WR Jahquan Bloomfield, WR Jonathan Hodoh, LB Traveion Webster, S Austin Hawley, K Calum Sutherland

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** The receiving corps is young with the potential to step up. Sutherland is a major upgrade to the kicking game. Rich Rodriguez almost always finds a way to get the most out of his quarterback in the zone-read attack.
**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** Bowden expects many changes to the potential lineup that emerged from the spring, and newcomers are going to have to carry a big load early in the season. The schedule is going to provide few opportunities for a win.

## OFFENSE

After last-place finishes in the conference in scoring, total offense and rushing, Louisiana-Monroe has plenty of work ahead as veteran coach Terry Bowden takes over.

The Warhawks return five starters, but lost their best player — tight end Josh Pederson, their only All-Sun Belt honoree. Many changes are likely coming in fall camp with several new faces replacing veterans from the winless 2020 unit.

One is at quarterback, where Arizona transfer Rhett Rodriguez, the son of new offensive coordinator Rich Rodriguez, looks to unseat returning starter Colby Suits. Rodriguez ran with the first unit in the spring game with so-so success. Suits completed 60.9 percent of his passes but for 192.1 yards per game.

Running back is a two-man competition. Sophomore Isaiah Phillips, who started two games near the end of the season, finished with 112 yards on 34 carries. Kayden Roach matched him with 112 yards as a freshman.

The top returning receiving targets all have similar numbers. Jahquan Bloomfield recorded 16 receptions for 312 yards and Perry Carter matched Bloomfield's yardage on 22 catches. Jonathan Hodoh had 251 yards on 22 receptions and Malik Jackson 189 on 23 catches.

Blake Lodes started every game at left tackle last season, but Evan Henry is the only other returning full-time starter up front. Center Garrett Hirsch and Victor Cutler each closed out the season as starters. Veteran guard T.J. Fiailoa transferred to instate rival Louisiana in the offseason.

## DEFENSE

Expect to see many new faces replacing incumbent starters on defense as well.

The Warhawks were last in scoring defense and against the run in the Sun Belt, but were fifth in pass defense to get up to No. 8 in total defense.

The Warhawks also were last in the conference in interceptions (four) and eighth in sacks, with an average of 1.3 per game (13 total).

The top five tacklers from last season all return, headlined by linebacker Traveion Webster (79) and safety Austin Hawley (77). Safety Jabari Johnson recorded 67 stops, safety Tyler Glass 43 and tackle Kevin Pointer 38.

Webster tied for second on the team in sacks with two, and Hawley had one of the team's four interceptions.

**TRAVEION WEBSTER**
Photo by Michael Wade

"It's a demanding schedule no doubt, but with challenges, come opportunities."
— Coach Terry Bowden

## SPECIAL TEAMS

The Warhawks will have two new kickers. Calum Sutherland, a transfer from Oklahoma who sat out last season, had an impressive showing in the spring game in taking over field-goal duty. Freshman Kip Warren is the only punter on the roster.

Carter returned both punts and kickoffs, and Phillips was the busiest kickoff return man with 19 for a 19.1-yard average.

## OVERVIEW

It's almost like Bowden and his staff are starting over with an expansion team after inheriting the 0-10 Warhawks. All but one of the losses (35-30 to Georgia Southern) came by double digits. They have two SEC games on the road (LSU and Kentucky) plus Liberty at home, as well as conference games against Coastal Carolina and Appalachian State on the road.

## TOP NEWCOMER

**QB Rhett Rodriguez**: The son of offensive coordinator Rich Rodriguez and transfer from Arizona took snaps with the first-team offense in the spring game and passed for 80 yards and three touchdowns. He appeared in 11 games overall for the Wildcats, including one start in 2018. Likely a future coach, Rodriguez is a high-IQ player who knows his dad's offense inside and out.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

### OFFENSE

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | 4 | Rhett Rodriguez | 6-0 | 196 | Jr. |
| RB | 3 | Isaiah Phillips | 5-7 | 198 | So. |
| **WR** | **18** | **Jonathan Hodoh*** | **6-0** | **203** | **Sr.** |
| WR | 7 | Zach Jackson | 6-0 | 196 | Jr. |
| **WR** | **17** | **Jahquan Bloomfield*** | **6-1** | **188** | **So.** |
| TE | 2 | Malik Jackson | 5-9 | 178 | So. |
| **LT** | **70** | **Blake Lodes*** | **6-7** | **315** | **So.** |
| **LG** | **51** | **Zach Breaux*** | **6-4** | **320** | **So.** |
| C | 57 | Garrett Hirsch | 6-3 | 315 | Sr. |
| **RG** | **74** | **Evan Henry*** | **6-3** | **325** | **Fr.** |
| RT | 59 | Victor Cutler | 6-3 | 294 | Fr. |

### DEFENSE

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | 95 | Elijah Fisher | 6-3 | 281 | Fr. |
| DT | 69 | Quincy Ledet Jr. | 6-2 | 278 | Fr. |
| **DT** | **91** | **Kevin Pointer*** | **6-1** | **285** | **Fr.** |
| **DE** | **44** | **Ty Shelby*** | **6-4** | **259** | **Sr.** |
| **LB** | **10** | **Traveion Webster*** | **6-0** | **211** | **Sr.** |
| **LB** | **7** | **KeyShawn Johnson*** | **6-0** | **225** | **So.** |
| **CB** | **20** | **Josh Newton*** | **5-11** | **195** | **So.** |
| CB | 12 | Kenderick Marbles | 5-11 | 183 | Jr. |
| **S** | **15** | **Austin Hawley*** | **6-1** | **195** | **Sr.** |
| **S** | **1** | **Tyler Glass*** | **6-1** | **220** | **Sr.** |
| **S** | **6** | **Keilos Swinney*** | **5-11** | **202** | **Sr.** |

### SPECIAL TEAMS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K | 31 | Calum Sutherland | 5-10 | 180 | Sr. |
| P | 43 | Kip Warren | 6-1 | 190 | Fr. |

*Returning starters in Bold

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | at Kentucky |
| Sept. 18 | JACKSON STATE |
| Sept. 25 | TROY |
| Oct. 2 | at Coastal Carolina |
| Oct. 9 | GEORGIA STATE |
| Oct. 16 | LIBERTY |
| Oct. 23 | SOUTH ALABAMA |
| Oct. 30 | at Appalachian State |
| Nov. 6 | at Texas State |
| Nov. 13 | ARKANSAS STATE |
| Nov. 20 | at LSU |
| Nov. 27 | at Louisiana |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| L | at Army | 7-37 |
| L | TEXAS STATE | 17-38 |
| L | UTEP | 6-31 |
| L | GEORGIA SOUTHERN | 30-35 |
| L | at Liberty | 7-40 |
| L | at South Alabama | 14-38 |
| L | APPALACHIAN STATE | 13-31 |
| L | at Georgia State | 34-52 |
| L | LOUISIANA | 20-70 |
| L | at Arkansas State | 15-48 |
| | at Troy | CAN |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 16.3 | 122 |
| Rushing | 76.3 | 125 |
| Passing | 229.4 | 65 |
| Total | 305.7 | 119 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 42.0 | 124 |
| Rushing | 249.3 | 121 |
| Passing | 215.3 | 42 |
| Total | 464.6 | 113 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 8 | - 0.80 | 113 |

# LOUISIANA TECH | BULLDOGS

C-USA rank: 2 | Record: 5-5 | C-USA record: 4-2 (3rd, West) | Stadium: Joe Aillet Stadium (28,019)

**RANKING 77**

## BULLDOGS at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Ruston, La.
**COACH:** Skip Holtz — At Louisiana Tech: 61-41, 8 years; overall: 115-89, 16 years
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Joe Sloan
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** David Blackwell

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** 2011, WAC
**LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING:** 2013
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 17; 5 offense, 10 defense, kicker, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB Luke Anthony, LT Dakota White, LB Trey Baldwin, LB Tyler Grubbs, CB Cedric Woods, S BeeJay Williamson, PR/WR Smoke Harris, PK Jacob Barnes

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** Anthony is efficient; the O-line returns four starters and the Bulldogs should be able to put up some points. The experience on defense, plus three SEC transfers for the secondary and a return from injury of DE Willie Baker, are causes for optimism.
**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** The defense has some talented individuals but wasn't good as a unit last season. Is Anthony healthy? The Bulldogs managed three points in its bowl loss 11 days after his broken leg in December.

**TYLER GRUBBS**
Photo by Steve Beyer

## OFFENSE

Considering the way quarterback Luke Anthony was carted off the field in December after a gruesome compound fracture in his right leg, concern about his future is valid.

Although Anthony, the 2020 C-USA Newcomer of the Year, missed the spring, coach Skip Holtz repeated time and again that doctors expect a full recovery in time for the season, which is welcome news after the quarterback threw for 16 touchdowns with five interceptions in 2020.

Still, Anthony did miss spring ball, as he did in 2020, so the injury and lack of reps are worrisome. Backup Aaron Allen, who led the charge in the spring, did play in 10 games last season, so the Bulldogs aren't exactly without options.

The skill positions aren't spectacular, but they are above average.

Returning starting receivers Isaiah Graham and Griffin Hebert, along with return specialist Smoke Harris, who led the team in receptions as a non-starter, will help either quarterback.

Appalachian State graduate transfer Marcus Williams Jr. will lead a running back committee that could surprise, or, at minimum, improve after ranking last in the league with 99.2 rushing yards per game.

A good year from the offensive line could be the difference between a good season and a potential run at a title.

## DEFENSE

If Louisiana Tech remains in the bottom third of the league in defense (11th in scoring defense in 2020, 11th in total defense, 11th in passing defense and ninth in rush defense), it won't be because of a lack of experience. The good news/bad news of the Bulldogs defense is there are 10 returning starters.

Starting in the back, Tech brings in three Southeastern Conference DBs from the transfer portal — Arkansas safety Myles Mason, Tennessee cornerback Baylen Buchanan and Vanderbilt corner Elijah Hamilton — to help a pair of talented safeties in BeeJay Williams (All-C-USA) and Khalil Ladler (All-C-USA honorable mention).

> "Talking with the doctors, everybody's incredibly optimistic. ... They're expecting 100 percent recovery."
> — Coach Skip Holtz on QB Luke Anthony's leg injury

Linebackers Trey Baldwin, Ezekiel Barnett and Tyler Grubbs are proven starters at linebacker, while the return of a 2019 leader gives the front seven every opportunity for improvement. Willie Baker had 10 tackles for loss in 2019 and missed 2020 with an injury. He will now be in rotation with returning starting ends Eric Kendzior and Deshon Hall.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Jacob Barnes, who double-dipped as punter and placekicker last season, is back. The Lou Groza semifinalist was 12 of 14 on field-goal attempts, including a 51-yarder. Both misses were from beyond 40 yards.

Harris has all-league capabilities as a punt returner (21.5-yard average in 2020).

## OVERVIEW

There are 17 returning starters, but one is a QB coming off a gruesome injury and 10 are from a defense that wasn't exactly great in 2020. A healthy Anthony and even slight improvements in the run game and from an experienced defense, should ensure the Bulldogs, who have a manageable schedule, will be in their usual position of being in West Division contention and bowling again.

## TOP NEWCOMER

**RB Marcus Williams Jr.**: He won't do it alone, but with the top two RBs gone from last season — a season in which the Bulldogs finished last in rushing in C-USA — the Appalachian State transfer will get every chance to lead the ground game. He gained more than 2,200 yards on the ground in four seasons at Appalachian State.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

### OFFENSE

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | 9 | **Luke Anthony*** | 6-1 | 210 | Sr. |
| RB | 26 | Marcus Williams Jr. | 5-10 | 210 | Sr. |
| WR | 13 | **Isaiah Graham*** | 6-0 | 188 | Sr. |
| WR | 80 | **Griffin Hebert*** | 6-3 | 217 | Jr. |
| WR | 5 | Smoke Harris | 5-6 | 184 | So. |
| WR | 83 | Tre Harris | 6-2 | 198 | Fr. |
| LT | 68 | Dakota White | 6-4 | 301 | Fr. |
| LG | 64 | **Joshua Mote*** | 6-3 | 287 | Jr. |
| C | 75 | Jerren Gilbert | 6-3 | 307 | Fr. |
| RG | 62 | **Abraham Delfin*** | 6-1 | 303 | Jr. |
| RT | 67 | Walker Hankinson | 6-6 | 284 | Fr. |

### DEFENSE

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | 93 | **Deshon Hall*** | 6-3 | 257 | So. |
| DT | 94 | **Keivie Rose*** | 6-3 | 297 | Fr. |
| DT | 43 | Tristan Allen | 6-4 | 265 | Jr. |
| DE | 47 | **Eric Kendzior*** | 6-3 | 240 | Sr. |
| LB | 3 | **Trey Baldwin*** | 6-2 | 233 | Sr. |
| LB | 46 | **Ezekiel Barnett*** | 6-2 | 207 | Sr. |
| LB | 52 | **Tyler Grubbs*** | 6-1 | 221 | Fr. |
| CB | 2 | **Zach Hannibal*** | 6-0 | 188 | Sr. |
| CB | 30 | **Cedric Woods*** | 510 | 170 | Fr. |
| S | 4 | **BeeJay Williamson*** | 6-1 | 185 | So. |
| S | 1 | **Khalil Ladler*** | 5-1 | 190 | Sr. |

### SPECIAL TEAMS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K | 35 | **Jacob Barnes*** | 5-9 | 170 | Fr. |
| P | 35 | **Jacob Barnes*** | 5-9 | 170 | Fr. |

*Returning starters in Bold

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | at Mississippi State |
| Sept. 11 | S.E. LOUISIANA |
| Sept. 18 | SMU |
| Sept. 25 | NORTH TEXAS |
| Oct. 2 | at NC State |
| Oct. 16 | at UTEP |
| Oct. 23 | UTSA |
| Oct. 30 | at Old Dominion |
| Nov. 6 | at UAB |
| Nov. 13 | CHARLOTTE |
| Nov. 20 | SOUTHERN MISS |
| Nov. 27 | at Rice |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | at Baylor | CAN |
| W | at Southern Miss | 31-30 |
| W | HOUSTON BAPTIST | 66-38 |
| L | at BYU | 14-45 |
| W | UTEP | 21-17 |
| L | MARSHALL | 17-35 |
| L | at UTSA | 26-27 |
| W | UAB (2OT) | 37-34 |
| | RICE | CAN |
| | vs. ULM | CAN |
| | at FIU | CAN |
| W | at North Texas | 42-31 |
| L | at TCU | 10-52 |
| | **NEW ORLEANS BOWL** | |
| L | vs. Georgia Southern | 3-38 |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 26.7 | T-78 |
| Rushing | 99.2 | 119 |
| Passing | 216.6 | 74 |
| Total | 315.8 | 117 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 34.7 | 96 |
| Rushing | 198.3 | 96 |
| Passing | 229.0 | 59 |
| Total | 427.3 | 81 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 1 | - 0.20 | T-74 |

# LOUISVILLE | CARDINALS

ACC rank: 11 | Record: 4-7 | ACC record: 3-4 (12th) | Stadium: Cardinal Stadium (60,000)

**RANKING 74**

## CARDINALS at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Louisville, Ky.
**COACH:** Scott Satterfield — At Louisville: 12-12, 2 years; overall: 59-28, 7 years
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** None
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Bryan Brown

**LEAGUE TITLE:** 2012, Big East, co-champs
**LAST BOWL:** 2019, Music City
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 15; 7 offense, 7 defense, kicker

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB Malik Cunningham, WR Jordan Watkins, OL Trevor Reid, LB C.J. Avery, DE YaYa Diaby, CB Tre Clark, S Kenderick Duncan

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** Louisville will have its best offensive line in years with a bunch of guys returning and some newcomers being a key; the running game will be solid. On defense, the Cardinals have pieces at just about every position and should make another big jump in the statistical categories.

**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** Replacing Tutu Atwell and Dez Fitzpatrick will be a huge deal for Louisville; the WR group is untested and lacks a playmaker down the field. On defense, the staff has to find someone to anchor the middle of the front line.

## OFFENSE

Louisville has to replace a trio of skill position players who were among the best in the ACC and posted ridiculous career numbers.

These guys are gone: Wide receiver Tutu Atwell (140 catches, 2,307 yards, 21 TDs), Dez Fitzpatrick (154 catches, 2,589 yards, 21 TDs) and running back Javian Hawkins (2,355 yards, 16 TDs in two seasons).

Good news: Malik Cunningham is back for a third season at quarterback. He threw for 2,617 yards and 20 TDs last season, although his interception total of 12 was too high. He's a dual-threat quarterback who has improved his decision-making and will be protected by a line that should be much improved.

Jalen Mitchell (347 yards, 2 TDs) emerged as a primary running back late in the season when Hawkins opted out. He leads a loaded backfield that also includes speedster Hassan Hall (1,027 yards and 10 TDs for his career) and true freshman Trevion Cooley, one of the top-rated recruits in the incoming class.

The line returns seven players who have started a game during their career, including multi-year starter Cole Bentley at center and Caleb Chandler at guard. Left tackle Trevor Reid is the most improved player on the offense, while Virginia Tech transfer Bryan Hudson can play multiple spots.

The biggest question mark is at wide receiver, where freshman Jordan Watkins and sophomore Braden Smith are the likely go-to guys, joined by former Georgia Southern QB Shai Werts.

## DEFENSE

Louisville's defense has made massive improvements in the first three seasons under coordinator Bryan Brown.

Linebacker C.J. Avery, who has led the team in tackles the past two seasons, decided to play a fifth year for the Cardinals. Monty Montgomery, Yasir Abdullah and Nick Okeke are also back at linebacker. Jack Fagot was moved from safety to the outside linebacker spot.

**MALIK CUNNINGHAM**
Photo by Winslow Townson-USA TODAY Sports

"I see growth and leadership throughout the whole team. I think we're a tighter bunch, I think the chemistry is better."
— Coach Scott Satterfield

Cornerback Tre Clark was a transfer from Liberty prior to last season and is perhaps the best player on defense. Chandler Jones is a veteran corner and Greedy Vance, Derrick Edwards and Kani Walker are young guys who will play.

The safety position doesn't have a lot of bodies, but Georgia Southern transfer Kenderick Duncan will start, along with Lovie Jenkins. Newcomers Benjamin Perry and Bralyn Oliver have bright futures.

The biggest question on defense is along the front line, where nose tackle Jared Goldwire will need to be replaced.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

James Turner is back after making 13 of 15 field-goal attempts and being perfect on all 40 extra points last season. Louisville is still searching for a punter, while four-year long snapper Mitch Hall has never had a bad snap.

## OVERVIEW

Louisville had a disappointing season a year ago and lost three main offensive weapons, but the Cardinals still should be better in the win column. The defense is going to be improved, while Cunningham will have a better line in front of him and the weapons to put up enough points.

## TOP NEWCOMER

**S Kenderick Duncan**: The former All-C-USA player at Georgia Southern comes in and fills a major void at the safety position for the Cardinals. The 6-3, 225-pound Duncan had 146 career tackles and six INTs in three seasons at Georgia Southern.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

**OFFENSE**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | 3 | **Malik Cunningham*** | 6-1 | 200 | Jr. |
| RB | 15 | Jalen Mitchell | 5-10 | 221 | Fr. |
| WR | 1 | Jordan Watkins | 5-11 | 175 | Fr. |
| WR | 81 | Braden Smith | 5-10 | 192 | So. |
| WR | 18 | **Justin Marshall*** | 6-3 | 213 | Jr. |
| TE | 83 | **Marshon Ford*** | 6-2 | 240 | So. |
| LT | 70 | Trevor Reid | 6-5 | 285 | Jr. |
| LG | 55 | **Caleb Chandler*** | 6-4 | 310 | Jr. |
| C | 66 | **Cole Bentley*** | 6-3 | 315 | Sr. |
| RG | 74 | **Adonis Boone*** | 6-5 | 310 | Jr. |
| RT | 56 | **Renato Brown*** | 6-4 | 330 | Fr. |

**DEFENSE**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | 6 | **YaYa Diaby*** | 6-4 | 255 | Jr. |
| NT | 92 | Malik Clark | 6-2 | 290 | Jr. |
| DE | 29 | **Tabarius Peterson*** | 6-3 | 260 | Sr. |
| LB | 38 | **Jack Fagot*** | 6-0 | 195 | Sr. |
| LB | 9 | **C.J. Avery*** | 5-11 | 230 | Sr. |
| LB | 7 | Monty Montgomery | 5-11 | 225 | Jr. |
| LB | 22 | **Yasir Abdullah*** | 6-1 | 225 | Jr. |
| CB | 13 | **Tre Clark*** | 5-10 | 165 | So. |
| CB | 2 | **Chandler Jones*** | 5-10 | 186 | Jr. |
| S | 27 | Kenderick Duncan | 6-3 | 225 | Jr. |
| S | 1 | Lovie Jenkins | 6-1 | 195 | Fr. |

**SPECIAL TEAMS**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K | 32 | **James Turner*** | 6-0 | 196 | So. |
| P | 40 | Brock Travelstead | 6-1 | 214 | Fr. |

*Returning starters in Bold

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 6 | vs. Mississippi (Atlanta, GA) |
| Sept. 11 | EASTERN KENTUCKY |
| Sept. 17 | UCF |
| Sept. 25 | at Florida State |
| Oct. 2 | at Wake Forest |
| Oct. 9 | VIRGINIA |
| Oct. 23 | BOSTON COLLEGE |
| Oct. 30 | at NC State |
| Nov. 6 | CLEMSON |
| Nov. 13 | SYRACUSE |
| Nov. 18 | at Duke |
| Nov. 27 | KENTUCKY |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| W | WESTERN KENTUCKY | 35-21 |
| L | MIAMI | 34-47 |
| L | at Pittsburgh | 20-23 |
| L | at Georgia Tech | 27-46 |
| L | at Notre Dame | 7-12 |
| W | FLORIDA STATE | 48-16 |
| L | VIRGINIA TECH | 35-42 |
| L | at Virginia | 17-31 |
| W | SYRACUSE | 30-0 |
| L | at Boston College | 27-34 |
| W | WAKE FOREST | 45-21 |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 29.5 | 55 |
| Rushing | 200.0 | T-29 |
| Passing | 244.2 | 48 |
| Total | 444.2 | 29 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 26.6 | 49 |
| Rushing | 179.9 | 80 |
| Passing | 189.2 | 17 |
| Total | 369.1 | 39 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 12 | - 1.09 | 119 |

# MEMPHIS | TIGERS

AAC rank: 4 Record: 8-3 AAC record: 5-3 (Tie-3rd) Stadium: Liberty Bowl Memorial (56,862)

**RANKING 63**

## TIGERS at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Memphis, Tenn.
**COACH:** Ryan Silverfield — At Memphis and overall: 8-3, 1 year
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Kevin Johns
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Mike Macintyre

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** 2019
**LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING:** 2013
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 15; 6 offense, 9 defense

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** RB Rodrigues Clark, WR Calvin Austin III, RT Dylan Parham, RG Matt Dale, DE Morris Joseph, DE Wardalis Ducksworth, SS Rodney Owens, FS Quindell Johnson

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** Whoever plays QB has a go-to guy to target — Austin is a good place to start for a program becoming known for cranking out NFL-caliber receivers. The offensive line should be able to create creases for the running game, and the defense could have a good pass rush off each end. Owens and Johnson are a fine safety duo.
**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** The quarterback question needs a positive answer, or the offense could fail to take advantage of its strengths. The O-line needs a new left tackle, not ideal for a team breaking in a new starter under center. The veteran defense gave up way too many big plays last season, and needs to get off to a much faster start this time.

**CALVIN AUSTIN III**
Photo by Joe Rondone/The Commercial Appeal USATNSYNDICATION

## OFFENSE

The big question around the Tigers is this: Who will replace quarterback Brady White? All White did in the past three years was throw for a school-record 10,690 yards and 90 touchdowns. Coach Ryan Silverfield probably got no closer to naming a starter out of spring practice than when White walked off the field after the Montgomery Bowl win over Florida Atlantic.

Four quarterbacks played in the spring game. Three of them tossed interceptions. That battle will continue until the team opens with Nicholls State on Sept. 4, and maybe beyond.

Whoever wins the job does have proven players around him. Rodrigues Clark (561 yards last year) is back at running back, and Calvin Austin III (63 receptions for 1,053 yards and 11 TDs) is as good a receiver as there is in the AAC.

Three starters return up front, but none of them is left tackle Obinna Eze, who transferred to TCU, meaning the new quarterback has an inexperienced blindside protector. On the other hand, the right side has good experience, led by All-AAC tackle Dylan Parham, a three-year starter.

## DEFENSE

This unit received a gigantic boost when several starters whose eligibility would have ended chose to take advantage of the NCAA's coronavirus response that offered players another year of eligibility. That means this defense, which showed vast improvement as the season wore on last season, can make the Tigers strong contenders for their second American Athletic Conference title in three years.

Up front, the marquee name is end Morris Joseph, who led the team in tackles for loss (10.5) and sacks (7). Wardalis Ducksworth added four sacks in a part-time role at the other end.

The return of three-year starters JJ Russell and Thomas Pickens solidifies the heart of this group, with starters returning at all four linebacker spots.

The secondary has star power: Free safety Quindell Johnson is coming off an all-conference season when he notched a team-high 81 stops, three interceptions and two forced fumbles. Strong safety Rodney Owens also had three picks, and Tyrez Lindsey opted to return for a fourth year as a regular in the secondary.

Jacobi Francis returns at one corner after breaking up a team-high seven passes, and Michigan State transfer Julian Barnett signaled during the spring that he could be a replacement for graduated cornerback TJ Carter.

> "Nothing seemed too big for them. They all seemed confident."
> — Coach Ryan Silverfield on Memphis' four QBs after the spring game

## SPECIAL TEAMS

There are sizeable holes to fill here with the graduation of Riley Patterson, who scored more points than any kicker in program history except Super Bowl champ Jake Elliott, and the departure of big-legged punter Adam Williams. Yet, Austin gives the team a scoring threat on any punt return, and the coverage units were excellent last year.

## OVERVIEW

Much of this season is likely to depend on how the quarterback situation shakes out. If the Tigers find the right one, they can contend for the AAC title. If not, then their defense will have to avoid falling into the shootouts that marked several games last season.

## TOP NEWCOMER

**CB Julian Barnett**: A top 100 recruit coming out of high school in Detroit, Barnett switched from wide receiver to cornerback prior to the 2020 season at Michigan State. His transfer to Memphis was timed nicely with the graduation of starting CB TJ Carter, offering immediate playing time.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **OFFENSE** | | | | | |
| QB | 12 | Keilon Brown | 6-1 | 184 | So. |
| RB | 2 | **Rodrigues Clark*** | 6-0 | 200 | Jr. |
| WR | 87 | Jeremy Tate Jr. | 6-4 | 220 | Jr. |
| WR | 13 | **Javon Ivory*** | 6-2 | 180 | So. |
| WR | 4 | **Calvin Austin III*** | 5-9 | 162 | Sr. |
| TE | 15 | Drew Martin | 6-3 | 230 | So. |
| LT | 72 | Michael Denson | 6-5 | 275 | Jr. |
| LG | 74 | **Isaac Ellis*** | 6-2 | 308 | Jr. |
| C | 70 | Jacob Likes | 6-2 | 280 | So. |
| RG | 75 | **Matt Dale*** | 6-6 | 320 | Sr. |
| RT | 56 | **Dylan Parham*** | 6-3 | 285 | Sr. |
| **DEFENSE** | | | | | |
| DE | 10 | **Morris Joseph*** | 6-2 | 275 | Sr. |
| NT | 99 | **Kajuan Robinson*** | 6-2 | 300 | So. |
| DE | 97 | Wardalis Ducksworth | 6-4 | 246 | Sr. |
| LB | 23 | **JJ Russell*** | 6-1 | 210 | Sr. |
| LB | 8 | **Xavier Cullens*** | 6-1 | 225 | Sr. |
| LB | 40 | **Thomas Pickens*** | 6-2 | 207 | Sr. |
| LB | 40 | **Jalil Clemons*** | 6-3 | 240 | Jr. |
| CB | 11 | Sylvonta Oliver | 5-10 | 175 | Sr. |
| CB | 1 | **Jacobi Francis*** | 5-11 | 193 | Sr. |
| S | 30 | **Rodney Owens*** | 6-0 | 180 | Sr. |
| FS | 15 | **Quindell Johnson*** | 6-1 | 195 | Jr. |
| **SPECIAL TEAMS** | | | | | |
| K | 47 | Noah Grant | 6-0 | 170 | So. |
| P | 91 | Austin McCready | 6-2 | 180 | So. |

*Returning starters in Bold

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | NICHOLLS STATE |
| Sept. 11 | at Arkansas State |
| Sept. 18 | MISSISSIPPI STATE |
| Sept. 25 | UTSA |
| Oct. 2 | at Temple |
| Oct. 9 | at Tulsa |
| Oct. 14 | NAVY |
| Oct. 22 | NC STATE |
| Nov. 6 | SMU |
| Nov. 13 | ECU |
| Nov. 19 | at Houston |
| Nov. 26 | TULANE |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| W | ARKANSAS STATE | 37-24 |
| L | at SMU | 27-30 |
| W | UCF | 50-49 |
| W | TEMPLE | 41-29 |
| L | at Cincinnati | 10-49 |
| W | SOUTH FLORIDA | 34-33 |
| | UT MARTIN | CAN |
| W | STEPHEN F. AUSTIN | 56-14 |
| W | at Navy | 10-7 |
| L | at Tulane | 21-35 |
| W | HOUSTON | 30-27 |
| | **MONTGOMERY BOWL** | |
| W | FLORIDA ATLANTIC | 25-10 |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 31.0 | 44 |
| Rushing | 145.2 | 80 |
| Passing | 307.9 | 17 |
| Total | 453.1 | 22 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 27.9 | 56 |
| Rushing | 145.1 | 45 |
| Passing | 289.2 | 117 |
| Total | 434.3 | 88 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| +1 | +0.09 | T-57 |

# MIAMI | HURRICANES

ACC rank: 3 Record: 8-3 ACC record: 7-2 (3rd, Coastal) Stadium: Hard Rock Stadium (64,767)

**RANKING 14**

## HURRICANES at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Coral Gables, Fla.
**COACH:** Manny Diaz — At Miami and overall: 14-10, 2 years
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Rhett Lashlee
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Manny Diaz

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** 2003, Big East co-champion
**LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING:** 2012
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 15; 9 offense, 5 defense, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB D'Eriq King, RB Cam'Ron Harris, WR Charleston Rambo, WR Mike Harley, TE Will Mallory, DE Deandre Johnson, S Bubba Bolden

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** King is a catalyst for the offense, and the receiving corps gets a big boost from the arrival of Rambo from Oklahoma. He could be the go-to guy the group lacked until Harley's closing run last year. Johnson arrives in time to replace Jaelan Phillips (8.0 sacks) as the primary pass rusher. The secondary could be outstanding.

**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** Receivers were inconsistent last year, and the defense yielded nearly 175 yards a game to opposing runners. King is coming off a knee injury that kept him on the sidelines in the spring. He's expected to be ready, but it's still worrisome for a quarterback who relies so much on his scrambling ability like King. Filling linebacker spots is a defensive priority.

## OFFENSE

D'Eriq King jump-started the offense in 2020, averaging 244.1 passing yards and 48.9 rushing yards after transferring from Houston. He injured his knee in Miami's bowl loss to Oklahoma State, but is expected to be ready this fall.

The Hurricanes return Cam'Ron Harris and Jaylon Knighton at running back, a veteran receiving corps that gets a boost from the transfer of Charleston Rambo from Oklahoma, and welcome back veteran guard Navaughn Donaldson to the five returning starters up front. Donaldson made only two appearances late in 2020, but was a starter in 2019.

Tight end Will Mallory may have been overshadowed by Brevin Jordan, but he had 22 catches for 329 yards and is a potential breakout star.

Rambo and Mike Harley (57 catches, 799 yards) appear to be locked in as starters at wide receiver. Dee Wiggins (31-358) and Mark Pope (33-403), who had 21 starts between them, will be in the rotation at the third spot, creating a deep fleet of receivers.

Harris rushed for a team-best 643 yards, averaging 5.1 per carry.

## DEFENSE

The Hurricanes return nine players with starting experience on defense, but a couple of them may find themselves in backup roles with the arrival of key transfers.

Among the newcomers are defensive end Deandre Johnson and cornerback Tyrique Stevenson. Johnson had 10 sacks in four seasons at Tennessee; Stevenson broke up 10 passes and made 47 tackles in two seasons at Georgia.

Defensive end Jahfari Harvey logged one start as a freshman last year and laid claim to the starting spot opposite Johnson coming out of the spring. He had five tackles for loss among his 18 tackles. Zach McCloud, a starter at linebacker last year, also is at end now.

**D'ERIQ KING**
Photo by AP Photo/John Raoux

"Rambo's a guy that, you get that ball to him in space, he's going to go. ... It's going to be a lot of fun."
— QB Jake Garcia on WR Charleston Rambo

Stevenson looks likely to start at one of the two corners, which also returns starters DJ Ivey and Al Blades Jr., along with promising Te'Cory Couch, who started the last four games.

Bubba Bolden (All-ACC second team), Gurvan Hall Jr. (three starts) and Amari Carter (nine starts) fill out the rotation at safety. Carter may be the hardest hitter on the team, but also tends to draw targeting penalties.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Kicker Andres Borregales is new but has good bloodlines. He is the younger brother of last year's kicker, Jose Borregales, who was sensational (20 of 22 on field-goal attempts) in his lone year at Miami after transferring from Florida International. Punter Lou Hedley (47.2-yard average) is a real weapon.

Stevenson looks to handle punt returns, and Harley and Knighton will handle kickoff returns.

## OVERVIEW

Miami showed marked improvement in 2020 after 2019's flat finish and has the potential to keep that going. But the 42-17 thumping at Clemson, the embarrassing performance in a 62-26 pounding at home by North Carolina, and the bowl loss to Oklahoma State show how far they must go on defense to contend for the conference title. Perhaps all that is just fuel for King and the rest of the Canes.

## TOP NEWCOMER

**WR Charleston Rambo:** Rambo transferred to Miami after spending his first four collegiate seasons at Oklahoma, where he recorded 76 receptions for 1,180 yards and nine touchdowns. His best season was 2019, when he hauled in 43 passes for 743 yards and five touchdowns.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **OFFENSE** | | | | | |
| QB | 1 | **D'Eriq King*** | 5-11 | 195 | Sr. |
| RB | 23 | **Cam'Ron Harris*** | 5-10 | 210 | Jr. |
| WR | 3 | **Mike Harley*** | 5-11 | 182 | Sr. |
| WR | 11 | Charleston Rambo | 6-1 | 185 | Jr. |
| WR | 8 | **Dee Wiggins*** | 6-3 | 195 | Jr. |
| TE | 85 | **Will Mallory*** | 6-5 | 245 | Jr. |
| LT | 60 | **Zion Nelson*** | 6-5 | 316 | So. |
| LG | 53 | **Jakai Clark*** | 6-3 | 305 | So. |
| C | 65 | **Corey Gaynor*** | 6-4 | 308 | Jr. |
| RG | 55 | Navaughn Donaldson | 6-6 | 350 | Sr. |
| RT | 51 | **DJ Scaife Jr.*** | 6-3 | 306 | Jr. |
| **DEFENSE** | | | | | |
| DE | 12 | Jahfari Harvey | 6-4 | 252 | Fr. |
| DT | 96 | **Jonathan Ford*** | 6-5 | 315 | Sr. |
| DT | 1 | **Nesta Jade Silvera*** | 6-2 | 306 | Jr. |
| DE | 13 | Deandre Johnson | 6-3 | 260 | Sr. |
| LB | 3 | **Gilbert Frierson*** | 6-1 | 210 | So. |
| LB | 11 | Corey Flagg Jr. | 5-11 | 230 | Fr. |
| LB | 9 | Avery Huff | 6-3 | 205 | Fr. |
| CB | 8 | **DJ Ivey*** | 6-1 | 195 | Jr. |
| CB | 2 | Tyrique Stevenson | 6-0 | 214 | So. |
| S | 21 | **Bubba Bolden*** | 6-3 | 204 | Jr. |
| S | 26 | Gurvan Hall Jr. | 6-0 | 192 | Jr. |
| **SPECIAL TEAMS** | | | | | |
| K | 30 | Andres Borregales | 5-11 | 170 | Fr. |
| P | 94 | **Lou Hedley*** | 6-4 | 225 | Jr. |

*Returning starters in Bold

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | vs. Alabama (Atlanta, GA) |
| Sept. 11 | APPALACHIAN STATE |
| Sept. 18 | MICHIGAN STATE |
| Sept. 25 | CENTRAL CONNECTICUT STATE |
| Sept. 30 | VIRGINIA |
| Oct. 16 | at North Carolina |
| Oct. 23 | NC STATE |
| Oct. 30 | at Pittsburgh |
| Nov. 6 | GEORGIA TECH |
| Nov. 13 | at Florida State |
| Nov. 20 | VIRGINIA TECH |
| Nov. 27 | at Duke |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| W | UAB | 31-14 |
| W | at Louisville | 47-34 |
| W | FLORIDA STATE | 52-10 |
| L | at Clemson | 17-42 |
| W | PITTSBURGH | 31-19 |
| W | VIRGINIA | 19-14 |
| W | at NC State | 44-41 |
| W | at Virginia Tech | 25-24 |
| W | at Duke | 48-0 |
| L | NORTH CAROLINA | 26-62 |
| | **CHEEZ-IT BOWL** | |
| L | vs. Oklahoma State | 34-37 |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 34.0 | 26 |
| Rushing | 162.5 | T-67 |
| Passing | 277.3 | 29 |
| Total | 439.8 | 32 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 27.0 | 51 |
| Rushing | 174.5 | T-76 |
| Passing | 233.9 | 65 |
| Total | 408.4 | 67 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 4 | + 0.36 | T-36 |

# MIDDLE TENNESSEE | BLUE RAIDERS

C-USA rank: 7 | Record: 3-6 | C-USA: 2-4 (5th, East) | Stadium: Floyd Stadium (30,788)

**RANKING 103**

## BLUE RAIDERS at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Murfreesboro, Tenn.
**COACH:** Rick Stockstill — At Middle Tennessee and overall: 94-92, 15 years
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Brent Dearmon
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Scott Shafer

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** 2006, Sun Belt co-champion
**LAST BOWL:** 2018, New Orleans Bowl
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 16; 5 offense, 10 defense, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB Bailey Hockman, WR Jarrin Pierce, DE Jordan Ferguson, LB DQ Thomas, LB Jonathan Butler, S Reed Blankenship, S Gregory Grate

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** The defense is a veteran crew with the return of 10 starters with good depth, and should improve against the run after allowing nearly 222 yards a game on the ground last year. The secondary is solid as well.
**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** Quarterback suddenly became an issue with veteran Asher O'Hara's departure in February for Sacramento State after he passed for 1,960 yards and rushed for a team-best 601 yards in nine games in 2020. His replacement was not settled in the spring.

## OFFENSE

Quarterback Asher O'Hara surprised the Blue Raiders by transferring to Sacramento State despite earning second-team All-Conference USA honors in 2020. But the Blue Raiders compensated by adding North Carolina State transfer Bailey Hockman in time for spring drills.

Hockman started nine games for the Wolfpack last year, passing for 2,008 yards in 10 appearances. He also started two games in 2019 after beginning his collegiate career at Florida State. Junior Chase Cunningham and sophomore Mike DiLiello also are in the mix to run the more up-tempo offense new coordinator Brent Dearmon is installing.

Starting running back Chaton Mobley returns, but he rushed for only 366 yards last season, and two players who opted out last season because of COVID-19 concerns will compete for playing time.

Amir Rasul, who was transferring in last season from Florida State when the coronavirus put things on hold, will enter fall camp No. 1 on the depth chart. Same story for Martell Pettaway, who left West Virginia for Middle Tennessee, but then skipped the 2020 season.

The receiving corps is deep and talented with the return of the top five pass catchers. Jarrin Pierce led the team with 59 receptions for 584 yards, followed by Yusuf Ali (37-457), CJ Windham (31-331), DJ England-Chisolm (14-172) and Jaylin Lane (13-122). Ali's numbers came in seven games after he missed the first two outings.

The line features two returning starters in guard Dorian Hinton and center Jordan Palmer; tackles Steven Losoya and Lance Robinson each logged starts last year. Georgia transfer Netori Johnson emerged from the spring No. 1 at right guard.

## DEFENSE

Even with the return of 10 veterans, the Blue Raiders could have some new starters on a defense that gave up 35.4 points and 446.0 yards per game in 2020.

Reed Blankenship is locked in at safety after leading the team with 76 tackles in nine games, and safety Gregory Grate was first-team all-conference after recording 74 tackles and picking off four passes.

Linebackers DQ Thomas (67 tackles, 3.5 sacks) and Johnathan Butler (45) are legitimate All-C-USA candidates, along with junior defensive end Jordan Ferguson, who posted a career-high 43 tackles.

Cornerback Quincy Riley started five times as a freshman and had two interceptions, and sophomore tackle Jordan Branch started seven games.

Moving up to No. 1 on the post-spring depth chart were tackle Marley Cook, end Richard Kinley, linebacker Cody Smith and cornerback Jalen Jackson.

**GREGORY GRATE**
Photo by Michael Wade

"We can still get better individually and collectively as a team."
— Coach Rick Stockstill

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Kyle Ulbrich is back after posting a career-best 43.8 average on 43 punts. Freshman Scott Payne is expected to be the place-kicker. Rasul and Riley are slated to handle kickoff returns, and Blankenship and Lane are down for punt return duty.

## OVERVIEW

The Blue Raiders are looking to recover from back-to-back losing seasons, but could find themselves in an early hole with three road games in the first month. To contend for a ninth bowl in Stockstill's 16th season, he needs to find the right answer at quarterback and the defense must step up.

## TOP NEWCOMER

**QB Bailey Hockman**: The transfer from NC State has a big edge in experience in the three-way battle at quarterback after starting nine games for the Wolfpack in 2020. He had a pair of 300-yard passing games (313 vs. Syracuse, 309 vs. Georgia Tech). He began his career at Florida State in 2017 before leaving for Hutchinson Community College and then NC State.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

### OFFENSE

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | 10 | Bailey Hockman | 6-2 | 206 | Jr. |
| RB | 34 | Amir Rasul | 5-10 | 198 | Sr. |
| **WR** | **7** | **DJ England-Chisolm*** | **5-7** | **150** | **So.** |
| **WR** | **9** | **Jarrin Pierce*** | **5-11** | **195** | **Sr.** |
| **WR** | **81** | **CJ Windham*** | **6-2** | **212** | **Sr.** |
| TE | 66 | Will Gilchrist | 6-2 | 239 | Sr. |
| LT | 74 | Steven Losoya | 6-4 | 305 | Fr. |
| **LG** | **78** | **Dorian Hinton*** | **6-4** | **317** | **Fr.** |
| **C** | **62** | **Jordan Palmer*** | **6-0** | **304** | **Jr.** |
| RG | 72 | Netori Johnson | 6-4 | 325 | Jr. |
| RT | 53 | Lance Robinson | 6-3 | 284 | Fr. |

### DEFENSE

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | 92 | Richard Kinley | 6-2 | 235 | Fr. |
| **LT** | **99** | **Jordan Branch*** | **6-0** | **283** | **So.** |
| RT | 57 | Marley Cook | 6-1 | 284 | Fr. |
| **DE** | **91** | **Jordan Ferguson*** | **6-2** | **262** | **Jr.** |
| **LB** | **20** | **DQ Thomas*** | **6-2** | **216** | **Sr.** |
| **LB** | **38** | **Johnathan Butler*** | **6-0** | **231** | **Jr.** |
| LB | 42 | Cody Smith | 6-2 | 220 | Jr. |
| CB | 23 | Jalen Jackson | 6-2 | 171 | Fr. |
| **CB** | **4** | **Quincy Riley*** | **6-0** | **181** | **Fr.** |
| **S** | **3** | **Gregory Grate*** | **5-11** | **197** | **Jr.** |
| **S** | **12** | **Reed Blankenship*** | **6-1** | **200** | **Sr.** |

### SPECIAL TEAMS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K | 24 | Scott Payne | 5-11 | 195 | Fr. |
| **P** | **13** | **Kyle Ulbrich*** | **6-0** | **197** | **Jr.** |

***Returning starters in Bold**

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | MONMOUTH |
| Sept. 11 | at Virginia Tech |
| Sept. 18 | at UTSA |
| Sept. 25 | at Charlotte |
| Oct. 2 | MARSHALL |
| Oct. 9 | at Liberty |
| Oct. 23 | at Connecticut |
| Oct. 30 | SOUTHERN MISS |
| Nov. 6 | at Western Kentucky |
| Nov. 13 | FIU |
| Nov. 20 | OLD DOMINION |
| Nov. 27 | at FAU |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| L | at Army | 0-42 |
| L | TROY | 14-47 |
| L | at UTSA | 35-37 |
| L | WESTERN KENTUCKY | 17-20 |
| W | at FIU | 31-28 |
| L | NORTH TEXAS | 35-52 |
| W | at Rice (2OT) | 40-34 |
| | CHARLOTTE | CAN |
| L | at Marshall | 14-42 |
| W | at Troy | 20-17 |
| | FAU | CAN |
| | UAB | CAN |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 22.9 | 104 |
| Rushing | 135.4 | 90 |
| Passing | 230.4 | 62 |
| Total | 365.9 | 89 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 35.4 | T-102 |
| Rushing | 221.9 | 111 |
| Passing | 224.1 | 52 |
| Total | 446.0 | 100 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 2 | - 0.22 | T-78 |

# SOUTH ALABAMA | JAGUARS

Sun Belt rank: 9 Record: 4-7 Sun Belt: 3-5 (2nd, West) Stadium: Hancock Whitney Stadium (25,000)

**RANKING 121**

## JAGUARS at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Mobile, Ala.
**COACH:** Kane Wommack — At South Alabama and overall: 1st year
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Major Applewhite
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Corey Batoon

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** None
**LAST BOWL:** 2016, Arizona Bowl
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 14: 4 offense, 8 defense, kicker, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB Jake Bentley, WR Jalen Tolbert, OL Antawn Lewis, DE Chris Henderson, DL Gi'Narious Johnson, LB Quentin Wilfawn, LB A.J. DeShazor, FS Keith Gallmon

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** The passing game should be vastly improved with Applewhite's scheme and Bentley's arm. The defense, which had its moments a year ago, should be better with Gallmon leading the way in a more aggressive approach. The roster is deeper with some returning starters on both sides now in backup roles.
**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** The offensive line has been the Jags' biggest issue for a couple of seasons, and could be again, although Louisiana Tech transfer Lewis is an upgrade. The running back group needs someone to step forward and take the reins; there are candidates, but thus far it's by committee.

**JALEN TOLBERT**
Photo by Bobby McDuffie/Icon Sportswire via AP Images

"I'm just very excited about our team. I love the energy and the culture that they've created."
— Coach Kane Wommack

## OFFENSE

Quarterback Jake Bentley stepped onto the practice field for spring practice and immediately took over the offense, being named the team's starter only days after spring drills concluded.

He has vast experience from his time at South Carolina and Utah, something South Alabama has needed at that position. Bentley, who has 8,409 career passing yards, quickly gained a feel for coordinator Major Applewhite's approach.

Applewhite wants the Jags to have a more vertical attack, and Bentley makes that possible, especially with All-Sun Belt receiver Jalen Tolbert. Wideouts Jalen Wayne, Caullin Lacy and Cade Sutherland, as well as tight end Lincoln Sefcik, will also be targets.

The Jags must improve their play up front. Transfer Antawn Lewis will help that aim at right tackle, with the expectation of at least one, perhaps two more transfers enrolling by the start of fall drills. Building depth there is key. Starters Hadon Merchant, Trey Simpson and Wyatt Green are back, but may be fighting for jobs.

At running back, no one took command in the spring. Look for Terrion Avery, AJ Phillips, John "Tank" Miller and Jared Wilson to continue to battle for the starting nod.

## DEFENSE

This unit held its own at times last season but often became winded late in games because of spending too many minutes on the field. Eight starters are returning.

Mike linebacker Quentin Wilfawn had a solid spring, as did nose tackle Gi'Narious Johnson and Wolf defensive end Chris Henderson. Free safety Keith Gallmon is the leader of the defense after a strong 2020 season. LB A.J. DeShazor is a player to watch as well.

Head coach Kane Wommack was a Broyles Award finalist last season as defensive coordinator at Indiana, which ranked among the country's best defensive units. Wommack hired Corey Batoon as the Jags' DC and together they have brought a 4-2-5 base that is built to create turnovers with a more aggressive style of play.

That was evident in spring drills as all three defensive areas demonstrated a solid grasp of what is expected.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Diego Guajardo made 13 of 17 field-goal tries last year, including both of his attempts from 50 yards and beyond. He proved good in the clutch and showed added distance in spring drills. Jack Brooks averaged 41.7 yards per punt a year ago, with a long of 66 yards, and had 11 punts of 50 yards or more.

## OVERVIEW

Building depth, especially along the offensive line, will be important, but the coaching staff appears on its way toward that goal. The Jags play four of their first six games at home but finish with a tough stretch — at Troy, at Appalachian State, at Tennessee and at home against Coastal Carolina.

Still, expectations are growing that this could be the Jags' first winning season as a Division I program, thanks to Wommack's swarming defensive approach and Applewhite's improved offensive take.

## TOP NEWCOMER

**QB Jake Bentley**: The transfer from Utah, by way of South Carolina, brings the experience and skills that South Alabama hasn't had at the position. He meshed well with Major Applewhite's playbook and WR Jalen Tolbert in the spring.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **OFFENSE** | | | | | |
| QB | 13 | Jake Bentley | 6-4 | 220 | Sr. |
| RB | 25 | Terrion Avery | 5-8 | 195 | Jr. |
| HB | 19 | Caullin Lacy | 5-10 | 175 | Fr. |
| **WR** | **8** | **Jalen Tolbert*** | **6-3** | **195** | **Jr.** |
| **WR** | **4** | **Jalen Wayne*** | **6-2** | **210** | **Jr.** |
| TE | 35 | Lincoln Sefcik | 6-2 | 230 | So. |
| LT | 79 | Braden Moody | 6-5 | 300 | Fr. |
| **LG** | **73** | **Hadon Merchant*** | **6-3** | **320** | **Jr.** |
| **C** | **58** | **Trey Simpson*** | **6-2** | **275** | **So.** |
| RG | 69 | Kent Foster | 6-3 | 300 | Jr. |
| RT | 54 | Antawn Lewis | 6-3 | 320 | Jr. |
| **DEFENSE** | | | | | |
| **BAN** | **11** | **Jamie Sheriff*** | **6-2** | **270** | **Jr.** |
| **NT** | **48** | **Gi'Narious Johnson*** | **6-0** | **295** | **Jr.** |
| DT | 99 | Wy'Kevious Thomas | 6-2 | 340 | Fr. |
| **WOLF** | **7** | **Chris Henderson*** | **6-4** | **240** | **Sr.** |
| **LB** | **10** | **Quentin Wilfawn*** | **6-1** | **245** | **Jr.** |
| **LB** | **3** | **A.J. DeShazor Jr.*** | **6-0** | **210** | **Jr.** |
| CB | 18 | Darrell Luter Jr. | 6-0 | 180 | Jr. |
| **CB** | **6** | **Devin Rockette*** | **5-10** | **175** | **Sr.** |
| S | 29 | Keon Voisin | 6-0 | 200 | So. |
| **S** | **4** | **Tre' Young*** | **5-11** | **170** | **Sr.** |
| **FS** | **33** | **Keith Gallmon*** | **5-9** | **205** | **Jr.** |
| **SPECIAL TEAMS** | | | | | |
| **K** | **36** | **Diego Guajardo*** | **6-0** | **195** | **So.** |
| **P** | **92** | **Jack Brooks*** | **6-0** | **200** | **So.** |

*Returning starters in Bold

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI |
| Sept. 11 | at Bowling Green |
| Sept. 18 | ALCORN STATE |
| Oct. 2 | LOUISIANA |
| Oct. 9 | at Texas State |
| Oct. 14 | GEORGIA SOUTHERN |
| Oct. 23 | at Louisiana Monroe |
| Oct. 30 | ARKANSAS STATE |
| Nov. 6 | at Troy |
| Nov. 13 | at Appalachian State |
| Nov. 20 | at Tennessee |
| Nov. 26 | COASTAL CAROLINA |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| W | at Southern Miss | 32-21 |
| L | TULANE | 24-27 |
| L | UAB | 10-42 |
| W | TEXAS STATE | 30-20 |
| W | LOUISIANA MONROE | 38-14 |
| L | at Georgia Southern | 17-24 |
| L | at Coastal Carolina | 6-23 |
| L | at Louisiana | 10-38 |
| L | GEORGIA STATE | 14-31 |
| W | at Arkansas State | 38-31 |
| L | TROY | 0-29 |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 19.9 | 112 |
| Rushing | 129.2 | 98 |
| Passing | 247.2 | 46 |
| Total | 358.5 | 95 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 27.3 | 53 |
| Rushing | 174.5 | T-76 |
| Passing | 261.9 | 104 |
| Total | 436.4 | 92 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 8 | - 0.09 | 71 |

# SOUTH FLORIDA | BULLS

AAC rank: 11 Record: 1-8 AAC: 0-7 (11th) Stadium: Raymond James Stadium (65,857)

RANKING 114

## BULLS at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Tampa, Fla.
**COACH:** Jeff Scott — At USF and overall: 1-8, 1 year
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Charlie Weis Jr.
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Glenn Spencer

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** None
**LAST BOWL:** 2018, Gasparilla
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 16; 9 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB Cade Fortin, RB Darrian Felix, WR Bryce Miller, WR Xavier Weaver, LB Antonio Grier, CB Daquan Evans, FS Mekhi LaPointe

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** The quarterback situation looked more promising in the spring, and the Bulls have some talent at wide receiver. The offensive line is an experienced group with five starters returning.
**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** The defense has a lot of work ahead after giving up nearly 212 yards a game to opposing rushers, and three starters in the front six must be replaced, including two linebackers.

### OFFENSE

An improved receiving corps, a line that returns five starters plus tight end Mitchell Brinkman, and a more settled situation at quarterback give hope to the South Florida offense after a disappointing 2020 season.

The Bulls' output of 365.3 yards per game ranked ahead of only Temple and Navy in the 11-team AAC. The Bulls never really got settled at quarterback, starting three different players at the crucial spot.

One of those — Jordan McCloud (seven starts) — transferred to Arizona. Katravis Marsh (one start) returns, but junior Cade Fortin came out of the spring with at least a tentative hold on the position. Fortin played in only two games as a transfer from North Carolina, completing 4 of 8 passes.

Miami transfer Jarren Williams, who logged 10 starts for the Hurricanes in 2019, and freshman Timmy McClain, who had some good moments in the spring, will contend for time in fall camp.

The Bulls return two of their top three receivers — Bryce Miller (33 catches, 327 yards) and Latrell Williams (22-260) along with promising junior Xavier Weaver (two starts in 2020). December signee Jimmy Horn Jr. also could figure in.

At running back, Kelly Joiner Jr. (368 yards rushing) started seven games, and Oregon transfer Darrian Felix is looking for a bounce-back season after injuries limited him to three appearances last year.

### DEFENSE

The defense took some personnel hits, but considering the unit gave up nearly 40 points per game that may not be all bad.

Linebackers Antonio Grier and Dwayne Boyles were the top two tacklers with 59 and 44 stops, respectively. Defensive tackle Thad Mangum, the third returning starter in the front six, was credited with 37 stops. Grier and Boyles missed time to injuries/COVID-19 protocols.

Transfers look to give the secondary, which loses veterans Bentlee Sanders and K.J. Sails, a shot of energy. TJ Robinson (Rutgers) came out of spring as a likely starter at safety, and Will Jones II (Kansas State) and Matthew Hill (Auburn) also are challenging for spots in the secondary.

Cornerback Daquan Evans led the Bulls in interceptions with three in 2020, and Vincent "Smoke" Davis had 34 tackles in six starts before going out with a knee injury.

**ANTONIO GRIER**
Photo by Joe Robbins

"We're a much better team than we were when we started spring ball in February. The question now is how do we finish?"
— Coach Jeff Scott

### SPECIAL TEAMS

Jared Sackett made 5 of 7 field-goal attempts in sharing the job with Spender Shrader, who made four of his tries, all from 40 yards or longer. Both return. Trent Schneider (41.3 average on 32 punts last year) owns six school punting records. Running back Brian Battie averaged nearly 20 yards on six kickoff returns, but the Bulls will be auditioning for a new punt returner.

### OVERVIEW

The Bulls ended the season on an eight-game losing streak and gave up a combined 114 points in losses to Houston and UCF to close out the year. Relief doesn't look to come until the third game when Florida A&M visits after outings against North Carolina State and Florida.

### TOP NEWCOMER

**DB TJ Robinson**: Robinson transferred from Rutgers and had to sit out last year when his appeal for a waiver didn't come through. He played in only four games in 2019, recording five tackles for the Scarlet Knights. A native of Riverview, Fla., in the Tampa Bay area, Robinson was impressive in spring practice and is a likely starter.

### 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

**OFFENSE**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | 6 | Cade Fortin | 6-3 | 222 | Jr. |
| RB | 3 | **Kelley Joiner*** | 5-9 | 179 | Jr. |
| WR | 10 | Xavier Weaver | 6-1 | 170 | Jr. |
| WR | 19 | **Bryce Miller*** | 5-10 | 180 | Sr. |
| WR | 8 | **Latrell Williams*** | 5-11 | 181 | Sr. |
| TE | 89 | **Mitchell Brinkman*** | 6-4 | 250 | Sr. |
| LT | 73 | **Donovan Jennings*** | 6-5 | 338 | Sr. |
| LG | 64 | **Demetris Harris*** | 6-3 | 324 | Sr. |
| C | 74 | **Brad Cecil*** | 6-4 | 300 | Sr. |
| RG | 52 | **Michael Wiggs*** | 6-3 | 309 | Sr. |
| RT | 57 | **Joshua Blanchard*** | 6-3 | 315 | So. |

**DEFENSE**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | 45 | Darrien Grant | 6-4 | 254 | Sr. |
| NG | 96 | Kelvin Pinkney | 6-3 | 315 | Sr. |
| DT | 23 | **Thad Mangum*** | 6-2 | 285 | Sr. |
| LB | 40 | Jason Vaughn | 6-5 | 235 | Jr. |
| LB | 11 | **Dwayne Boyles*** | 6-3 | 227 | Sr. |
| LB | 5 | **Antonio Grier*** | 6-1 | 222 | Sr. |
| CB | 0 | Daquan Evans | 5-11 | 185 | Jr. |
| CB | 41 | **Mychael Hampton*** | 6-1 | 215 | Jr. |
| S | 2 | TJ Robinson | 6-3 | 185 | So. |
| S | 22 | **Mekhi LaPointe*** | 6-2 | 200 | Sr. |
| S | 8 | Christopher Townsel | 6-2 | 185 | So. |

**SPECIAL TEAMS**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K | 28 | **Jared Sackett*** | 6-1 | 180 | Sr. |
| P | 39 | **Trent Schneider*** | 6-0 | 192 | Sr. |

***Returning starters in Bold**

### 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 2 | at NC State |
| Sept. 11 | FLORIDA |
| Sept. 18 | FLORIDA A&M |
| Sept. 25 | at BYU |
| Oct. 2 | at SMU |
| Oct. 16 | TULSA |
| Oct. 23 | TEMPLE |
| Oct. 28 | at ECU |
| Nov. 6 | HOUSTON |
| Nov. 12 | CINCINNATI |
| Nov. 20 | at Tulane |
| Nov. 26 | at UCF |

### 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| W | THE CITADEL | 27-6 |
| L | at Notre Dame | 0-52 |
| | at Florida Atlantic | CAN |
| L | at Cincinnati | 7-28 |
| L | EAST CAROLINA | 24-44 |
| L | at Temple | 37-39 |
| L | TULSA | 13-42 |
| L | at Memphis | 33-34 |
| L | at Houston | 21-56 |
| | NAVY | CAN |
| L | UCF | 46-58 |

### 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 23.1 | 102 |
| Rushing | 148.8 | 79 |
| Passing | 216.6 | 75 |
| Total | 365.3 | T-90 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 39.9 | 121 |
| Rushing | 212.3 | T-106 |
| Passing | 229.1 | 60 |
| Total | 441.4 | 94 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 4 | - 0.44 | T-95 |

# SOUTHERN MISS | GOLDEN EAGLES

C-USA rank: 6 | Record: 3-7 | C-USA record: 2-4 (6th, West) | Stadium: M.M. Roberts Stadium (56,862)

**RANKING 102**

## GOLDEN EAGLES at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Hattiesburg, Mississippi
**COACH:** Will Hall — At Southern Miss: 1st year
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Will Hall
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Austin Armstrong

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** 2014, tri-champs
**LAST BOWL:** 2019, Armed Forces
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 19; 10 offense, 7 defense, kicker, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB Trey Lowe, RB Frank Gore Jr., WR Jason Brownlee, LB Swayze Bozeman, LB Santrell Latham, S Malik Shorts

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** The combination of Gore and an experienced OL should lead to a strong ground game. Lowe has also shown he can take off for nice gains when needed. Bozeman and Latham give USM a pair of strong leaders in the linebacking corps.

**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** USM returns plenty of starters, but not enough proven talent down the depth chart. This could especially be a problem up front on both sides of the ball if injuries start to pile up. USM has a small running back corps and lacks a bruiser for short-yardage situations.

**FRANK GORE JR.**
Photo by Chuck Cook, USA TODAY Sports

## OFFENSE

With new coach Will Hall trying to put a jolt of energy into the program, Southern Miss is aiming for a rebound season following a difficult campaign that included three head coaches.

The former Tulane offensive coordinator will serve as his own offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach, implementing an offense he describes as multiple with pro elements and plenty of tempo.

Last year's starting quarterback, Jack Abraham, transferred to Mississippi State and his backup, Tate Whatley, decided to call it a career. That leaves redshirt sophomore Trey Lowe, a West Virginia transfer and a dual threat, as the favorite to start the season opener. Star signee Ty Keyes will be given a chance to see if he can make a jump in the fall.

USM was shallow and small at running back after the spring, but second-year freshman Frank Gore Jr. showed he can carry the load with 121 carries for 708 yards and two touchdowns in 2020.

Junior Jason Brownlee appears ready to take over as the go-to man at receiver after leading the team with 34 catches for 610 yards and five touchdowns in his first season out of junior college.

## DEFENSE

While USM has some nice pieces, there are plenty of questions heading into the fall after the defense suffered from inconsistent play over the past three seasons.

Linebacker Santrell Latham was clearly the team's best defender for much of the 2020 season, when he put up 49 tackles and four sacks in eight games. Middle linebacker Hayes Maples, who earned second-team all-conference honors last season, had a strong spring, but an apparent knee injury puts his season in some doubt.

The biggest change under first-year coordinator Austin Armstrong is that cornerbacks will be expected to play man-to-man. Eric Scott Jr. and Natrone Brooks show some promise at corner, and former all-conference selection Rachuan Mitchell should be healthy enough to contribute.

"You understand what he's saying is coming from the heart. You want to listen to him."
— RB Frank Gore Jr., on coach Will Hall

The loss of defensive lineman Jacques Turner, who transferred to Louisville, will be the biggest gap to fill. It will be up to Eriq Kitchen and Tahj Sykes to set the tone up front.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Briggs Bourgeois was steady at kicker last season, hitting 12 of 16 field-goal attempts, including a long of 49 yards. Sophomore Griffin Fleming averaged 39.5 yards on 36 punts. Camron Harrell showed some power and speed on returns last season, taking a kickoff back for a TD in the season finale.

## OVERVIEW

Jay Hopson resigned after a season-opening loss to South Alabama last year, leading to a chaotic season that included two interim head coaches — current Austin Peay head coach Scotty Walden and Tim Billings. Hall brings stability to Hattiesburg, and the players have enjoyed his attention to detail and organization.

Lowe's play during the spring gives some reason for hope on offense. It will be up to Armstrong, who is in his first stint as a defensive coordinator, to revive a defense that used to traditionally be one of the best in the Group of 5.

## TOP NEWCOMER

**DL Everitt Cunningham:** The transfer from Memphis is set to arrive in Hattiesburg this summer and will be relied on to make a major contribution at defensive end. He registered three sacks in 2019 and will have to provide some pass rush in the rotation.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **OFFENSE** | | | | | |
| QB | 8 | Trey Lowe | 6-2 | 218 | So. |
| RB | 3 | **Frank Gore Jr.*** | 5-8 | 185 | Fr. |
| WR | 13 | **Antoine Robinson*** | 6-1 | 178 | Jr. |
| WR | 17 | **Jason Brownlee*** | 6-3 | 192 | Jr. |
| WR | 0 | **Demarcus Jones*** | 5-11 | 200 | Jr. |
| TE | 89 | **Grayson Gunter*** | 6-5 | 247 | Sr. |
| LT | 79 | **Tykeem Doss*** | 6-5 | 379 | Jr. |
| LG | 65 | **Gerquan Scott*** | 6-4 | 331 | Fr. |
| C | 63 | **Arvin Fletcher*** | 6-3 | 313 | Sr. |
| RG | 68 | **Bryce Foxworth*** | 6-3 | 307 | Sr. |
| RT | 70 | **Khalique Washington*** | 6-5 | 339 | Sr. |
| **DEFENSE** | | | | | |
| DE | 24 | Dominic Quewon | 6-3 | 254 | Jr. |
| DT | 3 | **Tahj Sykes*** | 6-3 | 308 | Jr. |
| DT | 2 | **Eriq Kitchen*** | 6-2 | 286 | Sr. |
| DE | 46 | Averie Habas | 6-3 | 231 | So. |
| LB | 28 | **Swayze Bozeman*** | 6-3 | 228 | Sr. |
| LB | 6 | **Santrell Latham*** | 6-2 | 213 | Jr. |
| NB | 25 | Tyrek Moody | 5-10 | 191 | Jr. |
| CB | 12 | **Eric Scott Jr.*** | 6-2 | 192 | Jr. |
| CB | 18 | **Natrone Brooks*** | 5-11 | 160 | Jr. |
| SS | 9 | **Malik Shorts*** | 6-0 | 192 | So. |
| FS | 21 | Jay Stanley | 6-2 | 200 | Fr. |
| **SPECIAL TEAMS** | | | | | |
| K | 40 | **Briggs Bourgeois*** | 6-1 | 220 | Jr. |
| P | 49 | **Griffin Fleming*** | 6-1 | 200 | So. |

*Returning starters in Bold

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | at South Alabama |
| Sept. 11 | GRAMBLING STATE |
| Sept. 18 | TROY |
| Sept. 25 | at Alabama |
| Oct. 2 | at Rice |
| Oct. 9 | UTEP |
| Oct. 16 | UAB |
| Oct. 30 | at Middle Tennessee |
| Nov. 6 | NORTH TEXAS |
| Nov. 13 | at UTSA |
| Nov. 20 | at Louisiana Tech |
| Nov. 27 | FIU |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| L | SOUTH ALABAMA | 21-32 |
| L | LOUISIANA TECH | 30-31 |
| L | TULANE | 24-66 |
| W | at North Texas | 41-31 |
| L | at Liberty | 35-56 |
| L | RICE | 6-30 |
| W | NORTH ALABAMA | 24-13 |
| L | at Western Kentucky | 7-10 |
| L | UTSA | 20-23 |
| | at UAB | CAN |
| | at UTEP | CAN |
| W | FAU | 45-31 |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 25.3 | 87 |
| Rushing | 159.0 | 69 |
| Passing | 213.0 | T-77 |
| Total | 372.0 | 83 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 32.3 | T-85 |
| Rushing | 180.9 | 83 |
| Passing | 220.8 | 48 |
| Total | 401.7 | 60 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 3 | - 0.30 | T-86 |

# TROY | TROJANS

Sun Belt rank: 6 | Record: 5-6 | Sun Belt: 3-4 (5th, East) | Stadium: Veterans Memorial Stadium (30,000)

**RANKING 107**

## TROJANS at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Troy, Ala.
**COACH:** Chip Lindsey — At Troy and overall: 10-13, 2 years
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Chip Lindsey
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Brandon Hall

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** 2017
**LAST BOWL:** 2018, Dollar General
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 18; 10 offense, 8 defense

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB Gunnar Watson, RB Kimani Vidal, WR Reggie Todd, OT Austin Stidham, DT Will Choloh, BAN Richard Jibunor, LB Carlton Martial, CB Terence Dunlap

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** Troy has experienced options at quarterback. Vidal and B.J. Smith are a solid tailback combo. The receiving corps is loaded with playmakers. The offensive line is one of the league's best. Choloh and Jibunor are active up front. Martial is one of the nation's best linebackers. The secondary is solid.

**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** Troy could face a depth crisis at running back if it has an injury or two. Pass blocking was an issue at times a year ago. Troy's run defense needs more consistency. Rushing the passer could be problematic if Choloh or Jibunor go down. The kicking duties are a major question mark after the sudden departure of Jack Martin.

**CARLTON MARTIAL**
Photo by Michael Wade

## OFFENSE

Gunnar Watson, Jacob Free and Missouri transfer Taylor Powell are competing for the starting quarterback job on an offense loaded with experience.

Watson completed 211 of 301 pass attempts (70.1 percent) for 2,141 yards and 16 touchdowns — with seven interceptions — in nine games last season. Free completed 88 of 152 passes (57.9 percent) for 1,051 yards and six scores — with five picks — in six games. Powell played well in Troy's T-Day Game.

Kimani Vidal (516 yards and four touchdowns) led the team in rushing a year ago as a freshman and he'll combine with B.J. Smith, a quality receiver out of the backfield, to give the Trojans a nice one-two punch at tailback. DK Billingsley is expected to bounce back after a down year.

Reggie Todd (6-5, 212) and Kaylon Geiger (5-10, 176) have disparate sizes, but they are the top playmakers on a talented receiving corps. Tray Eafford and Luke Whittemore are rangy targets who are reliable. Tez Johnson and Deshon Stoudemire are breakout candidates.

Troy's offensive line, led by left tackle Austin Stidham and center Dylan Bradshaw, could be the class of the Sun Belt. Stidham was a first-team All-Sun Belt selection a year ago, while Bradshaw landed on the second team.

## DEFENSE

Troy could see an uptick on defense if it can improve against the run and find another pass rusher or two to complement defensive tackle Will Choloh and BANDIT (hybrid end/linebacker) Richard Jibunor, who each recorded 4.5 sacks a year ago.

John Hines Jr. ,Antonio Showers, Javon Solomon, Elgin Griffin and Shakel Brown are mainstays in the defensive line rotation. Jamarcus Chapman will also have a role.

Defensive tackle Luis Medina — two sacks in the T-Day Game — is a candidate to help Choloh and Jibunor, second- and third-team All-Sun Belt performers, respectively, in 2020, improve the pass rush.

Linebacker Carlton Martial is the heart and soul of the Trojans' defense and arguably the best player in the league. He's led the team in tackles for two consecutive seasons and attacks ball-carriers like a heat-seeking missile. Jayden McDaniel (67) and KJ Robertson (60) finished second and third on the team in tackles last year.

> "The guy that takes care of the ball the best and affects the team the best will win the job."
>
> — Coach Chip Lindsey on the QB battle

Troy's secondary is headlined by TJ Harris (SPEAR), Terence Dunlap, Dell Pettus, Craig Slocum and O'Shai Fletcher. Harris had 50 tackles and two sacks last season. Dunlap led the team in interceptions (three) and pass breakups (six).

Pettus was fourth on the team in tackles, had five pass breakups and added a pick. Slocum (45 tackles, one INT) and Fletcher (31) continue to improve.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Jack Martin abruptly left the team in the spring, leaving a huge hole in Troy's kicking game. He averaged 46.1 yards per punt and was in line to handle the majority of the kicking duties.

Tez Johnson is a candidate to return punts. Todd, Geiger and Eafford are quality options to return kicks.

## OVERVIEW

Chip Lindsey's team has the talent and experience to compete for a Sun Belt title, but unlike last year — lost four games by a combined 16 points — Troy will need to win close games. If the Trojans can win the tight ones, they'll be a title contender.

## TOP NEWCOMER

**DL Jamarcus Chapman**: Chapman, a former four-star prospect, transferred from Florida State following the 2019 season and sat out last year due to COVID-19. The Trojans need to get better stopping the run/rushing the passer and Chapman, a good athlete with size (6-foot-2, 283), is a candidate to help in both areas.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

### OFFENSE

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | 18 | **Gunnar Watson*** | 6-3 | 211 | So. |
| RB | 0 | **Kimani Vidal*** | 5-8 | 212 | Fr. |
| WR | 2 | **Reggie Todd*** | 6-5 | 212 | Sr. |
| WR | 3 | **Kaylon Geiger*** | 5-10 | 176 | Sr. |
| WR | 13 | **Tray Eafford*** | 6-1 | 199 | Sr. |
| WR | 10 | Luke Whittemore | 6-2 | 195 | Jr. |
| LT | 79 | **Austin Stidham*** | 6-5 | 291 | Jr. |
| LG | 67 | **Grant Betts*** | 6-3 | 292 | So |
| C | 65 | **Dylan Bradshaw*** | 6-3 | 298 | Sr. |
| RG | 55 | **Jake Andrews*** | 6-3 | 321 | So. |
| RT | 77 | **Derrick Graham*** | 6-4 | 292 | Fr. |

### DEFENSE

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | 30 | **John Hines Jr.*** | 6-4 | 256 | Sr. |
| DT | 5 | **Will Choloh*** | 6-0 | 299 | Jr. |
| NT | 21 | Shakel Brown | 6-4 | 315 | Jr. |
| BAN | 9 | Richard Jibunor | 6-3 | 225 | So. |
| LB | 2 | **Carlton Martial*** | 5-9 | 210 | Jr. |
| LB | 7 | **KJ Robertson*** | 6-1 | 235 | Jr. |
| SPR | 8 | **TJ Harris*** | 6-1 | 198 | Jr. |
| CB | 1 | **Terence Dunlap*** | 6-0 | 168 | Jr. |
| CB | 11 | O'Shai Fletcher | 5-11 | 177 | So. |
| S | 31 | **Dell Pettus*** | 6-0 | 201 | So. |
| S | 4 | **Craig Slocum*** | 6-0 | 201 | Jr. |

### SPECIAL TEAMS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K | 6 | Kyle Coale | 5-11 | 187 | Sr. |
| P | 6 | Kyle Coale | 5-11 | 187 | Sr. |

*Returning starters in Bold

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | SOUTHERN |
| Sept. 11 | LIBERTY |
| Sept. 18 | at Southern Miss |
| Sept. 25 | at Louisiana-Monroe |
| Oct. 2 | at South Carolina |
| Oct. 9 | GEORGIA SOUTHERN |
| Oct. 16 | at Texas State |
| Oct. 28 | at Coastal Carolina |
| Nov. 6 | SOUTH ALABAMA |
| Nov. 13 | LOUISIANA |
| Nov. 20 | APPALACHIAN STATE |
| Nov. 27 | at Georgia State |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| W | at Middle Tennessee | 47-14 |
| L | at BYU | 7-48 |
| W | TEXAS STATE | 37-17 |
| W | EASTERN KENTUCKY | 31-29 |
| L | GEORGIA STATE | 34-36 |
| W | at Arkansas State | 38-10 |
| L | at Georgia Southern | 13-20 |
| L | MIDDLE TENNESSEE | 17-20 |
| L | at Appalachian State | 10-47 |
| W | at South Alabama | 29-0 |
| L | COASTAL CAROLINA | 38-42 |
| | LOUISIANA-MONROE | CAN |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 27.4 | 70 |
| Rushing | 102.6 | 117 |
| Passing | 290.2 | 21 |
| Total | 392.8 | 65 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 25.7 | 42 |
| Rushing | 166.6 | 65 |
| Passing | 238.5 | 69 |
| Total | 405.1 | 61 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 4 | - 0.36 | T-91 |

# TULANE | GREEN WAVE

AAC rank: 6 | Record: 6-6 | AAC record: 3-5 (T-8th) | Stadium: Yulman (30,000)

**RANKING 84**

## GREEN WAVE at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** New Orleans
**Coach:** Willie Fritz — At Tulane: 29-33, 5 years; overall: 183-102, 24 years
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Chip Long
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Chris Hampton

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** 1998, Conference USA
**LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING:** 2017
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 16; 9 offense, 5 defense, kicker, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB Michael Pratt, RB Tyjae Spears, WR Duece Watts, C Sincere Haynesworth, DT Jeffery Johnson, LB Dorian Williams, LB Nick Anderson, S Larry Brooks

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** Pratt combines arm talent along with toughness and competitiveness, giving the Wave a dimension it lacked in previous years under Fritz. If healthy, Spears is a game-breaking talent. Long has a better pedigree than any Tulane assistant in ages and should be an excellent replacement for Will Hall, who left to become coach at Southern Miss. The linebackers are terrific.

**POTENTIAL WEAKNESSES:** The receivers are unproven behind Watts and Jha'Quan Jackson, with no other returning player having 20 catches. Good opponents have stacked the box and successfully dared the Wave to beat one-on-one coverage. The secondary, which came up empty in several critical moments, has to prove those breakdowns are in the past.

**MICHAEL PRATT**
Photo by AP Photo/Steve Conner

"We've run the ball very effectively in the last five years and we're going to continue to be able to keep doing that, but we've got to throw the ball more effectively."
— Coach Willie Fritz

## OFFENSE

Coming off the second-highest scoring season in school history (34.7 points per game), Tulane is looking for a fourth consecutive bowl game in 2021.

Consider that in a run-first offense, quarterback Michael Pratt didn't start until Tulane's fourth game, but by the time he was finished, his 20 touchdown passes led all freshmen in the country. Pratt needs to improve his efficiency (55.1 percent, 1,808 yards), but if he builds on his debut season, Tulane will have the balance needed to attack top-notch defenses.

New offensive coordinator Chip Long, a Broyles Award finalist (top assistant in the country) when he was at Notre Dame in 2018, spent the bulk of spring drills working on the passing game.

Wide receivers Duece Watts and Jha'Quan Jackson, each with 31 receptions, should post bigger numbers in their second year with Pratt and first with Long. Long's offense is friendly to tight ends, so Tyrick James (18 catches, 202 yards) can expect a significant jump.

Coach Willie Fritz teams have produced four of the top five rushing totals in school history, and Tulane averaged a league-best 217.1 yards last year despite losing game-breaker Tyjae Spears to a torn ACL early in the third game. If fully recovered, Spears is a threat to gain 1,000 yards, while Cameron Carroll (741 yards, team-high 12 rushing TDs) and Utah grad transfer Devin Brumfield will be significant factors, too.

The line returns four starters, including All-AAC candidates guard Corey Dublin and center Sincere Haynesworth.

## DEFENSE

Despite losing all-conference ends Cameron Sample and Patrick Johnson, Tulane should be better defensively than a year ago, when it gave up far too many big plays in third-and long situations, prompting Fritz to change coordinators.

These guys are loaded at linebacker. Starters Marvin Moody (72 tackles) and Kevin Henry elected to return for an extra COVID year, and Dorian Williams had a team-high 98 tackles and 16.5 stops for loss. Fellow backup Nick Anderson (88 tackles) got better as the year went along.

Promising redshirt freshman Angelo Anderson will step in for Johnson, but the impact of Sample (the most valuable lineman in the country according to Pro Football Focus), cannot be replicated by one player.

Safety Larry Brooks and cornerback Jaylon Monroe lead an experienced secondary, supplemented by transfers Lance Robinson (Kansas State) and Derrion Rakestraw (Colorado).

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Punter Ryan Wright was not as consistent as his league-leading 45.2-yard average suggests, but he has improved in each of his three years. PK Merek Glover is reliable from inside 40 yards, but his career long field goal is 44 yards.

## OVERVIEW

Tulane is 7-6, 7-6 and 6-6 the past three years, a dramatic improvement from the mess Fritz inherited, but it has yet to become an AAC contender. The pieces are there to take the next step following a rough home opener against Oklahoma.

The Wave needs to win the close ones that got away in 2020. It lost three games on the final play (Navy, SMU and Tulsa).

## TOP NEWCOMER

**S Derrion Rakestraw**: The grad transfer from Colorado had 36 tackles in six games a year ago and 43 tackles in 2019. Tulane needed some new blood in the secondary, and he should provide immediate help as a starter.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

### OFFENSE

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | 7 | **Michael Pratt*** | 6-2 | 200 | Fr. |
| RB | 22 | **Tyjae Spears*** | 5-10 | 190 | Fr. |
| WR | 2 | **Duece Watts*** | 6-2 | 195 | Jr. |
| WR | 4 | **Jha'Quan Jackson*** | 5-9 | 185 | So. |
| WR | 82 | Jaetavian Toles | 6-0 | 180 | Sr. |
| TE | 80 | **Tyrick James*** | 6-2 | 250 | Jr. |
| LT | 79 | **Joey Claybrook*** | 6-6 | 295 | Jr. |
| LG | 64 | **Corey Dublin*** | 6-4 | 312 | Sr. |
| C | 52 | **Sincere Haynesworth*** | 6-1 | 310 | So. |
| RG | 68 | Josh Remetich | 6-3 | 275 | Fr. |
| RT | 72 | **Trey Tuggle*** | 6-6 | 295 | Fr. |

### DEFENSE

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | 54 | Carlos Hatcher | 6-3 | 240 | So. |
| NT | 94 | Eric Hicks Jr. | 6-2 | 285 | Fr. |
| DT | 77 | **Jeffery Johnson*** | 6-3 | 330 | Jr. |
| JOKER | 3 | Angelo Anderson | 6-3 | 255 | Fr. |
| LB | 24 | Dorian Williams | 6-1 | 220 | So. |
| LB | 40 | Nick Anderson | 5-11 | 230 | Jr. |
| NB | 37 | Macon Clark | 6-0 | 185 | Jr. |
| CB | 9 | **Jaylon Monroe*** | 5-9 | 180 | Sr. |
| CB | 7 | Lance Robinson | 5-10 | 194 | So. |
| SS | 31 | **Larry Brooks*** | 6-0 | 200 | Jr. |
| FS | 13 | Derrion Rakestraw | 6-2 | 200 | Sr. |

### SPECIAL TEAMS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K | 62 | **Merek Glover*** | 6-0 | 200 | Sr. |
| P | 97 | **Ryan Wright*** | 6-3 | 245 | Jr. |

*Returning starters in Bold

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | OKLAHOMA |
| Sept. 11 | MORGAN STATE |
| Sept. 18 | at Ole Miss |
| Sept. 25 | UAB |
| Oct. 2 | at East Carolina |
| Oct. 7 | HOUSTON |
| Oct. 21 | at SMU |
| Oct. 30 | CINCINNATI |
| Nov. 6 | at UCF |
| Nov. 13 | TULSA |
| Nov. 20 | USF |
| Nov. 27 | at Memphis |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| W | at South Alabama | 27-24 |
| L | NAVY | 24-27 |
| W | at Southern Miss | 66-24 |
| L | at Houston | 31-49 |
| L | SMU | 34-37 |
| L | at UCF | 34-51 |
| W | TEMPLE | 38-3 |
| W | at East Carolina | 38-21 |
| W | ARMY | 38-12 |
| L | at Tulsa (2OT) | 24-30 |
| W | MEMPHIS | 35-21 |
| | **FAMOUS IDAHO POTATO BOWL** | |
| L | vs. Nevada | 27-38 |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 34.7 | 22 |
| Rushing | 217.1 | 17 |
| Passing | 176.7 | 109 |
| Total | 393.8 | 63 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 28.1 | 57 |
| Rushing | 143.3 | 42 |
| Passing | 278.7 | 115 |
| Total | 422.0 | 77 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 5 | + 0.42 | 37 |

# UAB | BLAZERS

C-USA rank: 3 | Record: 6-3 | C-USA record: 3-1 C-USA (1st, West) | Stadium: Legion Field (71,000)

RANKING 85

## BLAZERS at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Birmingham, Ala.
**COACH:** Bill Clark — At UAB and overall: 40-22, 5 years
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Bryant Vincent
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** David Reeves

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** 2020
**LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING:** 2016
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 17; 6 offense, 9 defense, kicker, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB Tyler Johnston III, RB DeWayne McBride, TE Hayden Pittman, OT Sidney Wells, OG Colby Ragland, DT Antonio Moultrie, DE Justin Thomas, STAR Kristopher Moll, CB TD Marshall, S Will Boler

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** If games and championships are truly won in the trenches then UAB is in good shape. The Blazers arguably have the best offensive and defensive lines in the conference.
**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** Wide receiver and inside linebacker are the biggest question marks. But the schedule — at Georgia, vs. Liberty — may pose the biggest problem.

**DEWAYNE McBRIDE**
Photo by Michael Wade

"The bullseye gets bigger and bigger. This team has high expectations. We have one of the toughest schedules in the country, so we have a lot of work to do."
— Coach Bill Clark

## OFFENSE

Most of the attention in fall camp will be on what the coaches call a three-man quarterback competition and the search for go-to receivers. That's understandable, but what makes this offense tick are the big guys up front.

The Blazers have perhaps more offensive line talent and depth than any other C-USA team. Guard Colby Ragland and tackle Sidney Wells were first-team All-C-USA selections last season, and guard Matthew Trehern was honorable mention.

Running back DeWayne McBride replaces the departed Spencer Brown after averaging 9.3 yards on 47 carries as a true freshman, when he had TD runs of 75 and 71 yards. Speedy Mississippi State transfer Lee Witherspoon should provide big plays, while veteran Lucious Stanley is a reliable backup.

At quarterback, Tyler Johnston III, Dylan Hopkins and Bryson Lucero will compete for the starting nod. All three have started games at UAB. However, there's no doubt that Johnston is this team's leader. He has great touch on the deep ball and keeps defenses honest with his legs. What he does best, though, is find ways to win.

Depth and quality at receiver are mysteries, but the Blazers came out of spring practice feeling better about the position. Trea Shropshire was magnificent in the championship game win over Marshall and Ryan Davis was a standout in the spring.

## DEFENSE

One constant in the Bill Clark Era is that the Blazers are salty on defense. That won't change this year.

No matter where he lines up on the field, senior Kristopher Moll has been one of the top defenders in the conference. Moll is listed as a safety this season, but could play some at the Star linebacker position, where he excelled in 2018. Steady senior Dy'Jonn Turner will also play a similar role.

UAB is loaded up front. Antonio Moultrie is one of the top interior defensive linemen in the conference. Defensive end Alex Wright is an all-conference player, and LSU transfer Justin Thomas is expected to do big things.

Jack linebacker Kelle Sanders emerged in the spring and could combine with Justin Thomas to replace Jordan Smith's production. Inside linebacker Noah Wilder is a former walk-on who has developed into a solid player. Depth could be an issue inside.

The secondary features experienced talent. Cornerback TD Marshall is back, and Starling Thomas V was a full-time starter in 2019 before missing last year. UAB has three safeties — Will Boler, Damon Miller and Grayson Cash — with starting experience.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Kyle Greenwell is one of the top punters in C-USA (42.6-yard average last season) and kicker Matt Quinn was 11 of 12 on field-goal attempts as a freshman.

## OVERVIEW

Three consecutive C-USA West championships. Two C-USA titles in the past three seasons. Four consecutive bowl-eligible teams since the program returned in 2017. The talent is there for the Blazers to keep on keeping on, but they'll have to maneuver through the program's toughest schedule in years.

## TOP NEWCOMER

**DE Justin Thomas**: The LSU transfer was not eligible to play last fall, but he did practice with the team and was a scout team terror. He started one game, and played in five, for the Tigers during their 2019 national championship season. He had eight tackles, two for loss with a sack, that year.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **OFFENSE** | | | | | |
| QB | 17 | **Tyler Johnston III*** | 6-2 | 210 | Sr. |
| RB | 22 | DeWayne McBride | 5-11 | 220 | So. |
| WR | 11 | Trea Shropshire | 6-3 | 190 | Sr. |
| WR | 6 | Ryan Davis | 5-11 | 175 | So. |
| WR | 3 | RaJae' Johnson-Sanders | 6-4 | 225 | Sr. |
| TE | 10 | **Hayden Pittman*** | 6-4 | 230 | Sr. |
| LT | 77 | Kadeem Telfort | 6-8 | 315 | Sr. |
| LG | 53 | **Colby Ragland*** | 6-5 | 310 | Sr. |
| C | 55 | **Andrew Smith*** | 6-1 | 310 | Sr. |
| RG | 61 | **Matthew Trehern*** | 6-3 | 315 | Sr. |
| RT | 62 | **Sidney Wells*** | 6-4 | 325 | Sr. |
| **DEFENSE** | | | | | |
| DE | 16 | **Alex Wright*** | 6-7 | 260 | Jr. |
| DT | 44 | **Antonio Moultrie*** | 6-4 | 285 | Sr. |
| DT | 10 | **Tyree Turner*** | 6-1 | 305 | Sr. |
| JACK | 2 | Kelle Sanders | 6-6 | 250 | Sr. |
| LB | 50 | **Noah Wilder*** | 6-0 | 235 | Sr. |
| STAR | 14 | **Dy'jonn Turner*** | 5-11 | 205 | Sr. |
| STAR | 6 | **Kristopher Moll*** | 6-2 | 225 | Sr. |
| CB | 8 | **TD Marshall*** | 6-0 | 195 | Sr. |
| CB | 4 | Starling Thomas V | 5-11 | 185 | Jr. |
| S | 21 | **Will Boler*** | 6-0 | 210 | Sr. |
| S | 26 | **Damon Miller*** | 6-0 | 195 | Jr. |
| **SPECIAL TEAMS** | | | | | |
| K | 19 | **Matt Quinn*** | 5-10 | 175 | So. |
| P | 98 | **Kyle Greenwell*** | 6-1 | 205 | Sr. |

*Returning starters in Bold

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 1 | vs. Jacksonville State (Montgomery, AL) |
| Sept. 11 | at Georgia |
| Sept. 18 | at North Texas |
| Sept. 25 | at Tulane |
| Oct. 2 | LIBERTY |
| Oct. 9 | FAU |
| Oct. 16 | at Southern Miss |
| Oct. 23 | RICE |
| Nov. 6 | LOUISIANA TECH |
| Nov. 13 | at Marshall |
| Nov. 20 | at UTSA |
| Nov. 27 | UTEP |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| W | CENTRAL ARKANSAS | 45-35 |
| L | at Miami | 14-31 |
| W | at South Alabama | 42-10 |
| W | UTSA | 21-13 |
| W | WESTERN KENTUCKY | 37-14 |
| L | LOUISIANA | 20-24 |
| L | at Louisiana Tech (2OT) | 34-37 |
| | NORTH TEXAS | CAN |
| | at UTEP | CAN |
| | SOUTHERN MISS | CAN |
| | at Middle Tennessee | CAN |
| W | at Rice | 21-16 |
| | **C-USA CHAMPIONSHIP GAME** | |
| W | at Marshall | 22-13 |
| | **GASPARILLA BOWL** | |
| | vs. South Carolina | CAN |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 28.4 | 65 |
| Rushing | 200.0 | T-29 |
| Passing | 201.3 | 88 |
| Total | 401.3 | 60 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 21.4 | 26 |
| Rushing | 137.9 | 35 |
| Passing | 173.2 | 7 |
| Total | 311.1 | 7 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 2 | - 0.22 | T-78 |

# UCF | KNIGHTS

**RANKING 33**

AAC rank: 2 | Record: 6-4 | AAC: 5-3 (T-3rd) | Stadium: Spectrum Stadium (44,206)

## KNIGHTS at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Orlando
**COACH:** Gus Malzahn — At UCF: 1st year; overall: 77-38, 9 years
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS:** Tim Harris Jr., G.J. Kinne
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Travis Williams

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** 2018
**LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING:** 2015
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 16; 8 offense, 6 defense, kicker, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB Dillon Gabriel, WR Jaylon Robinson, WR Brandon Johnson, DE Tre'Mon Morris-Brash, LB Eriq Gilyard, LB Jeremiah Jean-Baptiste, S Derek Gainous

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** Robinson was an All-AAC first-team selection and Gabriel a second-team honoree in 2020. All-AAC first-team selections G Cole Schneider and C Matthew Lee anchor an offensive line that is experienced and deep.
**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** There are some big holes to fill on defense with the departures of leading tackler and All-AAC selection Richie Grant and second-team All-AAC pick Aaron Robinson in the secondary. The top two rushers (Greg McRae and Otis Anderson) also are gone.

## OFFENSE

New head coach Gus Malzahn inherits one of the most explosive offenses in the AAC, led by all-conference quarterback Dillon Gabriel, who backed up an outstanding freshman campaign (3,653 passing yards) with a stellar season (3,570 yards in 10 games) in 2020.

Gabriel no longer has Marlon Williams (71 catches, 1,039 yards) as a target, but welcomes back second-team All-AAC selection Jaylon Robinson (55-979) and Ryan O'Keefe (20-391), who started six games, including the last three.

The top two rushers, Greg McRae and Otis Anderson, are gone, but junior Ben Thompson (382 yards on 73 carries) leads a stable of talented young running backs that includes former quarterback R.J. Harvey, a transfer from Virginia who had an impressive spring.

The backbone of the offense is a deep front line that returns five players who started more than half of UCF's 10 games, including all-conference guard Cole Schneider and center Matthew Lee. Guard Lokahi Pauole received honorable mention all-conference honors.

## DEFENSE

UCF's key returners include linebackers Eriq Gilyard, who was the Knights' second-leading tackler behind safety Richie Grant with 59 stops (8.5 for losses) and Tatum Bethune (57 tackles, 2.5 sacks).

Other returnees who had at least five starts are tackle Anthony Montalvo (10 starts), cornerbacks Corey Thornton (10) and Davonte Brown (five). Thornton had 30 tackles and an interception playing as a true freshman.

Safety Derek Gainous started four games and finished with 46 tackles (No. 4 on the team) and an interception, and end Tre'Mon Morris-Brash and tackle Noah Hancock started three games each.

Kalia Davis, who opted out of the 2020 season because of COVID concerns after starting nine games in 2019, also returns. He showed his versatility in the spring game by lining up on offense behind center and taking a direct snap for a first down on a third-down play in the red zone.

Freshman defensive back Quadric Bullard and Georgia transfer Divaad Wilson add depth in the secondary. Wilson played in only five games for the Knights in 2020 and finished with 11 tackles and a forced fumble. He started the bowl game and finished with three tackles with one for a loss.

**DILLON GABRIEL**
Photo by AP Photo/John Raoux

"Make no mistake, we are a team. And we are an extremely close team."
— First-year coach Gus Malzahn

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Juniors Daniel Obarski and Andrew Osteen are back to handle the kicking duties. Obarski made 12 of 17 field-goal attempts and Osteen averaged 43.9 yards on 40 punts. O'Keefe was the primary kick returner, and Amari Johnson had two punt returns as a freshman last year.

## OVERVIEW

The Knights seem primed for another run at an AAC East title in coach Gus Malzahn's first season. They led the league in scoring, passing and total offense in 2020 and have the weapons to duplicate those numbers. The defense under new coordinator Travis Williams, who replaced Randy Shannon, must step up after allowing 33.2 points and a league-high 491.8 yards a game.

## TOP NEWCOMER

**WR Brandon Johnson**: From Fort Lauderdale, Fla., the graduate transfer from Tennessee gives the receiving corps a big boost. He had 79 receptions for 969 yards in 46 games for the Volunteers. In nine games last year, he recorded 19 receptions for 231 yards with a high of 73 yards on three catches in the Vols' win at South Carolina.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

**OFFENSE**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | 11 | **Dillon Gabriel*** | 6-0 | 186 | Jr. |
| RB | 24 | Bentavious Thompson | 6-1 | 197 | Sr. |
| WR | 3 | Brandon Johnson | 6-2 | 195 | Sr. |
| WR | 4 | **Ryan O'Keefe*** | 5-10 | 175 | Jr. |
| WR | 1 | **Jaylon Robinson*** | 5-9 | 163 | Jr. |
| TE | 88 | Jake Hescock | 6-7 | 252 | Sr. |
| LT | 70 | **Edward Collins*** | 6-6 | 310 | Jr. |
| LG | 65 | **Cole Schneider*** | 6-4 | 312 | Sr. |
| C | 55 | **Matthew Lee*** | 6-4 | 290 | So. |
| RG | 77 | **Lokahi Pauole*** | 6-4 | 320 | Jr. |
| RT | 73 | **Samuel Jackson*** | 6-6 | 335 | Sr. |

**DEFENSE**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DE | 33 | Tre'Mon Morris-Brash | 6-2 | 235 | Jr. |
| DT | 22 | **Kalia Davis*** | 6-2 | 285 | Sr. |
| DT | 94 | **Anthony Montalvo*** | 6-3 | 283 | Sr. |
| DE | 88 | Josh Celiscar | 6-4 | 230 | So. |
| LB | 10 | **Eriq Gilyard*** | 5-11 | 228 | Sr. |
| LB | 11 | Jeremiah Jean-Baptiste | 6-2 | 230 | Jr. |
| LB | 15 | **Tatum Bethune*** | 6-1 | 215 | Jr. |
| CB | 7 | **Davonte Brown*** | 6-2 | 180 | So. |
| CB | 14 | **Corey Thornton*** | 6-1 | 175 | So. |
| S | 9 | Divaad Wilson | 6-0 | 195 | Jr. |
| S | 21 | Derek Gainous | 6-0 | 183 | Sr. |

**SPECIAL TEAMS**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K | 98 | **Daniel Obarski*** | 6-2 | 180 | Jr. |
| P | 36 | **Andrew Osteen*** | 6-1 | 175 | Jr. |

*Returning starters in Bold

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 4 | BOISE STATE |
| Sept. 11 | BETHUNE-COOKMAN |
| Sept. 17 | at Louisville |
| Oct. 2 | at Navy |
| Oct. 9 | EAST CAROLINA |
| Oct. 16 | at Cincinnati |
| Oct. 22 | MEMPHIS |
| Oct. 30 | at Temple |
| Nov. 6 | TULANE |
| Nov. 13 | at SMU |
| Nov. 20 | CONNECTICUT |
| Nov. 26 | SOUTH FLORIDA |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| W | at Georgia Tech | 49-21 |
| W | at East Carolina | 51-28 |
| L | TULSA | 26-34 |
| L | at Memphis | 49-50 |
| W | TULANE | 51-34 |
| W | at Houston | 44-21 |
| W | TEMPLE | 38-13 |
| L | CINCINNATI | 33-36 |
| W | at South Florida | 58-46 |
| | **BOCA RATON BOWL** | |
| L | vs. BYU | 23-49 |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 42.2 | 8 |
| Rushing | 210.7 | 25 |
| Passing | 357.4 | 4 |
| Total | 568.1 | 2 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 33.2 | 92 |
| Rushing | 192.6 | 93 |
| Passing | 299.2 | 121 |
| Total | 491.8 | 123 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| + 12 | + 1.20 | 5 |

# WESTERN KENTUCKY | HILLTOPPERS

C-USA rank: 8 Record: 5-7 C-USA record: 4-3 (3rd, East) Stadium: Houchens Industries-L.T. Smith Stadium (22,113)

RANKING 105

## HILLTOPPERS at a GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Bowling Green, Ky.
**COACH:** Tyson Helton — At Western Kentucky and overall: 14-11, 2 years
**OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS:** Zach Kittley, Bryan Ellis
**DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR:** Maurice Crum

**LAST LEAGUE TITLE:** 2016
**LAST TIME DIDN'T GO BOWLING:** 2018
**RETURNING STARTERS:** 10; 5 offense, 4 defense, punter

**PLAYERS TO WATCH:** QB Bailey Zappe, WR Jerreth Sterns, WR Josh Sterns, OL Cole Spencer, DE DeAngelo Malone, DT Jeremy Darvin, NT Juwuan Jones

**PRIMARY STRENGTHS:** WKU has three of the four starters on the defensive line back, and Malone was the C-USA Defensive Player of the Year two seasons ago. On offense, the Toppers have two solid linemen in Spencer and Mason Brooks, and a third in Nebraska transfer Boe Wilson.
**POTENTIAL PROBLEMS:** The Toppers don't have a lot of experience back and the 18 transfers is a lot to try to mesh together. Also, two coaches from the staff were promoted and four new faces joined the staff.

## OFFENSE

There's a new coordinator in town to help an offense that languished at 290.3 yards per game last season.

Coach Tyson Helton hired Zach Kittley, who is billed as having one of the game's great young minds. Consider that he helped coach NFL MVP Patrick Mahomes for three years at Texas Tech, and then helped turn Houston Baptist into one of the most prolific passing offenses in college football.

Four key offensive players, including quarterback Bailey Zappe, followed Kittley from Houston Baptist.

In only four games during the 2020 season, Zappe completed 141 of 215 passes for 1,833 yards, 15 TDs and one interception. Three wide receivers all now at WKU — Jerreth Sterns, Josh Sterns and Ben Ratzlaff — had 89 catches for 1,256 yards and 12 TDs.

Zappe, who was named Southland Conference Player of the Year, threw for 567 yards against Texas Tech. It marked the most ever for an FCS player against an FBS defense.

Running back Gaej Walker is gone after leading the Toppers in rushing for two straight seasons. South Dakota State grad transfer Adam Cofield transferred in, while Jakairi Moses and C.J. Jones return.

Right tackle Cole Spencer and left tackle Mason Brooks are back, but the other three starters are gone after combining for 117 starts. Boe Wilson started 23 games at Nebraska and is a graduate senior, while Cameron Stage transferred in from Bowling Green.

## DEFENSE

WKU had the top scoring defense in the conference in 2019, when the Toppers won nine games and the First Responder Bowl, but the numbers weren't as good last season.

Defensive coordinator Clayton White left for a job on the South Carolina staff, and Maurice Crum was elevated to become the new coordinator. He had served as the co-defensive coordinator and linebackers coach.

WKU has some key players back but, they will need to return to the '19 production.

DeAngelo Malone and Juwuan Jones saw their sack totals drop last season. Jones had just two after five in 2018 and seven in '19. Malone was still named first-team all-conference last season, but had been the Player of the Year in 2019. Malone has 25 sacks and 42 tackles for loss during his career.

Jeremy Darvin also returns up front, while Nick Days is back at linebacker. The Toppers must replace most of the secondary.

**DeANGELO MALONE**
Photo by AP Photo/James Kenney

"We want to set the tone in the defense, and one of our goals is to be a top defense in the country. We try to have a Mamba mentality."

— CB Beanie Bishop on the WKU defense

## SPECIAL TEAMS

John Haggerty III averaged 45.7 yards per punt last season and will be back for another season; Cory Munson was the backup placekicker and will battle Brayden Narveson, who made 13 of 14 field-goal attempts.

## OVERVIEW

Western Kentucky was one of just 16 teams in FBS that played 12 games last season, but they only won five. The offense should be better, but it might take time to implement the high-power passing game. The defensive line is one of the best in C-USA and there are other playmakers. Helton and his staff have 20 newcomers — 18 of whom are transfers.

## TOP NEWCOMER

**QB Bailey Zappe**: Hard not to go with the guy who was Southland Conference Player of the Year. For his career at Houston Baptist, Zappe completed 900 of 1,477 passes (60.9 percent) for 10,004 yards with 78 touchdowns and 39 interceptions.

## 2021 PROJECTED STARTERS

### OFFENSE

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| QB | 4 | Bailey Zappe | 6-2 | 215 | Sr. |
| RB | 3 | Jakairi Moses | 5-9 | 190 | Jr. |
| **WR** | **5** | **Mitchell Tinsley*** | **6-1** | **195** | **Jr.** |
| **WR** | **2** | **Craig Burt Jr.*** | **6-4** | **205** | **Jr.** |
| WR | 19 | Dayton Wade | 5-10 | 175 | So. |
| **TE** | **6** | **Joshua Simon*** | **6-5** | **240** | **So.** |
| **LT** | **77** | **Mason Brooks*** | **6-6** | **305** | **Jr.** |
| LG | 53 | Rusty Staats | 6-4 | 315 | So. |
| C | 75 | Gunner Britton | 6-6 | 290 | So. |
| RG | 56 | Boe Wilson | 6-3 | 300 | Sr. |
| **RT** | **70** | **Cole Spencer*** | **6-4** | **295** | **Jr.** |

### DEFENSE

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **DE** | **10** | **DeAngelo Malone*** | **6-4** | **230** | **Sr.** |
| **NT** | **0** | **Jeremy Darvin*** | **6-1** | **295** | **Sr.** |
| DT | 97 | Darius Shipp | 6-1 | 290 | Jr. |
| **DE** | **34** | **Juwuan Jones*** | **6-3** | **270** | **Jr.** |
| LB | 5 | Nick Days | 6-3 | 225 | So. |
| LB | 25 | Bryson Washington | 6-0 | 235 | So. |
| NB | 27 | Omari Alexander | 5-10 | 180 | Sr. |
| CB | 9 | Dominique Bradshaw | 6-0 | 180 | Jr. |
| CB | 21 | Beanie Bishop | 5-10 | 170 | So. |
| S | 2 | A.J. Brathwaite Jr. | 6-0 | 190 | So. |
| **S** | **31** | **Antwon Kincade*** | **5-11** | **200** | **Sr.** |

### SPECIAL TEAMS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K | 46 | Cory Munson | 6-3 | 185 | So. |
| **P** | **47** | **John Haggerty III*** | **6-5** | **230** | **Sr.** |

***Returning starters in Bold**

## 2021 SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| Sept. 2 | UT MARTIN |
| Sept. 11 | at Army |
| Sept. 25 | INDIANA |
| Oct. 2 | at Michigan State |
| Oct. 9 | UTSA |
| Oct. 16 | at Old Dominion |
| Oct. 23 | at FIU |
| Oct. 30 | CHARLOTTE |
| Nov. 6 | MIDDLE TENNESSEE |
| Nov. 13 | at Rice |
| Nov. 20 | FAU |
| Nov. 27 | at Marshall |

## 2020 RESULTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| L | at Louisville | 21-35 |
| L | LIBERTY | 24-30 |
| W | at Middle Tennessee | 20-17 |
| L | MARSHALL | 14-38 |
| L | at UAB | 14-37 |
| W | CHATTANOOGA | 13-10 |
| L | at BYU | 10-41 |
| L | at FAU | 6-10 |
| W | SOUTHERN MISS | 10-7 |
| W | FIU | 38-21 |
| W | at Charlotte | 37-19 |
| | **LENDINGTREE BOWL** | |
| L | vs. Georgia State | 21-39 |

## 2020 RANKINGS

| OFFENSE | PER GAME | RANK |
|---|---|---|
| Scoring | 19.0 | 114 |
| Rushing | 126.0 | 102 |
| Passing | 164.3 | 111 |
| Total | 290.3 | 120 |
| **DEFENSE** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| Scoring | 25.3 | 40 |
| Rushing | 171.3 | 72 |
| Passing | 177.3 | 8 |
| Total | 348.7 | 28 |
| **TO MARGIN** | **PER GAME** | **RANK** |
| - 5 | - 0.42 | 94 |

Pat Sullivan
AUBURN
QUARTERBACK, 1971

Photo by Malcolm Emmons-USA TODAY Sports

# A Look BACK

## 5 YEARS AGO: 2016

Defending national champion Alabama started at No. 1 and stayed there until a national title rematch with Clemson. Clemson had opened the season with a narrow 19-13 win over Auburn, but by the time of the playoffs, QB Deshaun Watson had raised his team to a different level — Alabama's level, which was a cut above the rest of the country. Nick Saban's Crimson Tide rode the high, wide wave of a 26-game winning streak into the rematch in Tampa on Jan. 9, 2017. Remarkably it came down to the final play — a Watson-to-Hunter Renfrow 2-yard toss with 0:01 on the clock for a stunning 35-31 triumph.

**SEC Champion:** No. 1 Alabama (14-1, 8-0) beat No. 15 Florida in SEC title game, 54-16.

**SEC Offensive POY:** Jalen Hurts, QB, Alabama

**SEC Defensive POY:** Jonathan Allen, DL, Alabama

**Heisman Trophy:** Lamar Jackson, QB, Louisville; 7th-Allen

**National Champion:** No. 2 Clemson (13-1) beat No. 1 Alabama in CFP title game.

## 10 YEARS AGO: 2011

The monster matchup that was No. 1 LSU vs. No. 2 Alabama on Nov. 5 all but determined the SEC champion. But when the visiting Tigers rallied to beat Alabama, 9-6, in overtime in the regular-season game, the pollsters couldn't quit the Crimson Tide. Moreover, when the dust settled at the conclusion of the regular season, the pollsters and computers of the Bowl Championship Series vaulted Alabama over Oklahoma State to pit the two SEC West powers in a rematch — this time in New Orleans. Approaching the game there was talk of possibly splitting the national title, but the Tide removed any doubt by swamping the Tigers, 21-0.

**SEC Champion:** No. 1 LSU (13-1, 8-0) beat No. 12 Georgia in SEC title game, 42-10.

**SEC Offensive POY:** Trent Richardson, RB, Alabama

**SEC Defensive POY:** Morris Claiborne, DB, LSU

**Heisman Trophy:** Robert Griffin III, QB, Baylor; 3rd-Richardson; 5th-Tyrann Mathieu, DB, LSU.

**National Champion:** No. 2 Alabama (12-1) beat No. 1 LSU in BCS title game, 21-0.

## 15 YEARS AGO: 2006

No. 2 Florida stumbled in a mid-October trip to Auburn but rose back to the top of the SEC East and peaked at the right time. Florida was No. 4 heading into the SEC title game against Arkansas, but the stars aligned as No. 3 Michigan lost to No. 1 Ohio State, and UCLA stunned No. 2 USC, leaving the door open for Urban Meyer's boys. The Gators trailed, 21-17, in the second half before freshman Wondy Pierre-Louis recovered a muffed punt for one touchdown, and Percy Harvin bolted 67 yards for another, and the Gators won, 38-28. That put them in the national title game against unbeaten Ohio State. Even after OSU's Ted Ginn Jr. returned the opening kickoff for a TD, Florida drilled the Buckeyes, 41-14.

**SEC Champion:** No. 4 Florida (13-1, 7-1) beat No. 8 Arkansas in SEC title game, 38-28.

**SEC Offensive POY:** Darren McFadden, RB, Arkansas

**SEC Defensive POY:** Patrick Willis, LB, Mississippi

**Heisman Trophy:** Troy Smith, QB, Ohio State; 2nd-McFadden

**National Champion:** No. 2 Florida beat No. 1 Ohio State in BCS title game, 41-14.

## 20 YEARS AGO: 2001

As November arrived in Nick Saban's second season in Baton Rouge, LSU was 2-3 in the SEC but somehow remained in the hunt in the hypercompetitive West Division. The Tigers rattled off successive victories over Alabama, Arkansas and finally Auburn (in 2001 the Sept. 15 games were postponed until Dec. 1), and somehow, the 5-3 Tigers had worked their way into the SEC Championship Game. There, they faced second-ranked Tennessee, riding a seven-game winning streak and poised to advance to the BCS title game. But LSU freshman QB Matt Mauck came off the bench to lead a fourth-quarter rally and the Tigers topped UT for their first SEC title since 1986.

**SEC Champion:** No. 21 LSU (10-3, 5-3) beat No. 2 Tennessee in SEC title game, 31-20.

**SEC Player of the Year:** Rex Grossman, QB, Florida

**Heisman Trophy:** Eric Crouch, QB, Nebraska; 2nd-Grossman.

**National Champion:** No. 1 Miami (12-0) beat No. 4 Nebraska in the Rose Bowl, 37-14.

## 25 YEARS AGO: 1996

After No. 2 Florida State had beaten No. 1 Florida, 24-21, at the end of the regular season, the Gators still managed to finish No. 3 in the polls. Back when the Pac-10 and Big Ten weren't quite involved, that put Florida in the Bowl Alliance championship game for a strange rematch with the Seminoles. Earlier in the day, No. 2 Arizona State was knocked off by Ohio State in the Rose Bowl, which left the Sugar to claim an undisputed national title game. And Steve Spurrier and his Gators did not disappoint, rolling to a surprisingly easy 52-20 victory — Florida's first national championship. Danny Wuerffel led the SEC record-breaking offense to 46.6 points a game and became the first Heisman winner to play for a Heisman winner (Spurrier, 1966).

**SEC Champion:** No. 4 Florida (12-1, 8-0) beat No. 11 Alabama in SEC title game, 45-30.

**SEC Player of the Year:** Danny Wuerffel, QB, Florida

**Heisman Trophy:** Wuerffel; 8th-Peyton Manning, QB, Tennessee

**National Champion:** No. 3 Florida beat No. 1 Florida State in the Sugar Bowl, 52-20.

## 50 YEARS AGO: 1971

This was the year of the Game of the Century between No. 1 Nebraska and No. 2 Oklahoma on Thanksgiving Day. The Cornhuskers won, 35-31, and went on to roll past Bear Bryant's No. 2-ranked Alabama in the Orange Bowl, 38-6. Still, it was quite a year for Bear and Bama, winning the sixth of his 14 SEC titles. Alabama enjoyed a perfect regular season, starting with a 17-10 win over fifth-ranked USC, and ended with a 31-7 win over Sullivan and fifth-ranked Auburn. This was the season Bryant integrated Alabama's football program for the first time, breaking the color barrier with lineman John Mitchell Jr., whom he later hired on his staff. In 2021, Mitchell is still an assistant head coach with the Pittsburgh Steelers.

**SEC Champion:** Alabama (11-1, 7-0)

**SEC MVP:** Johnny Musso, RB, Alabama

**Heisman Trophy:** Pat Sullivan, QB, Auburn; 4th-Musso

**National Champion:** No. 1 Nebraska (13-0) beat No. 2 Alabama in the Sugar Bowl, 38-6.

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